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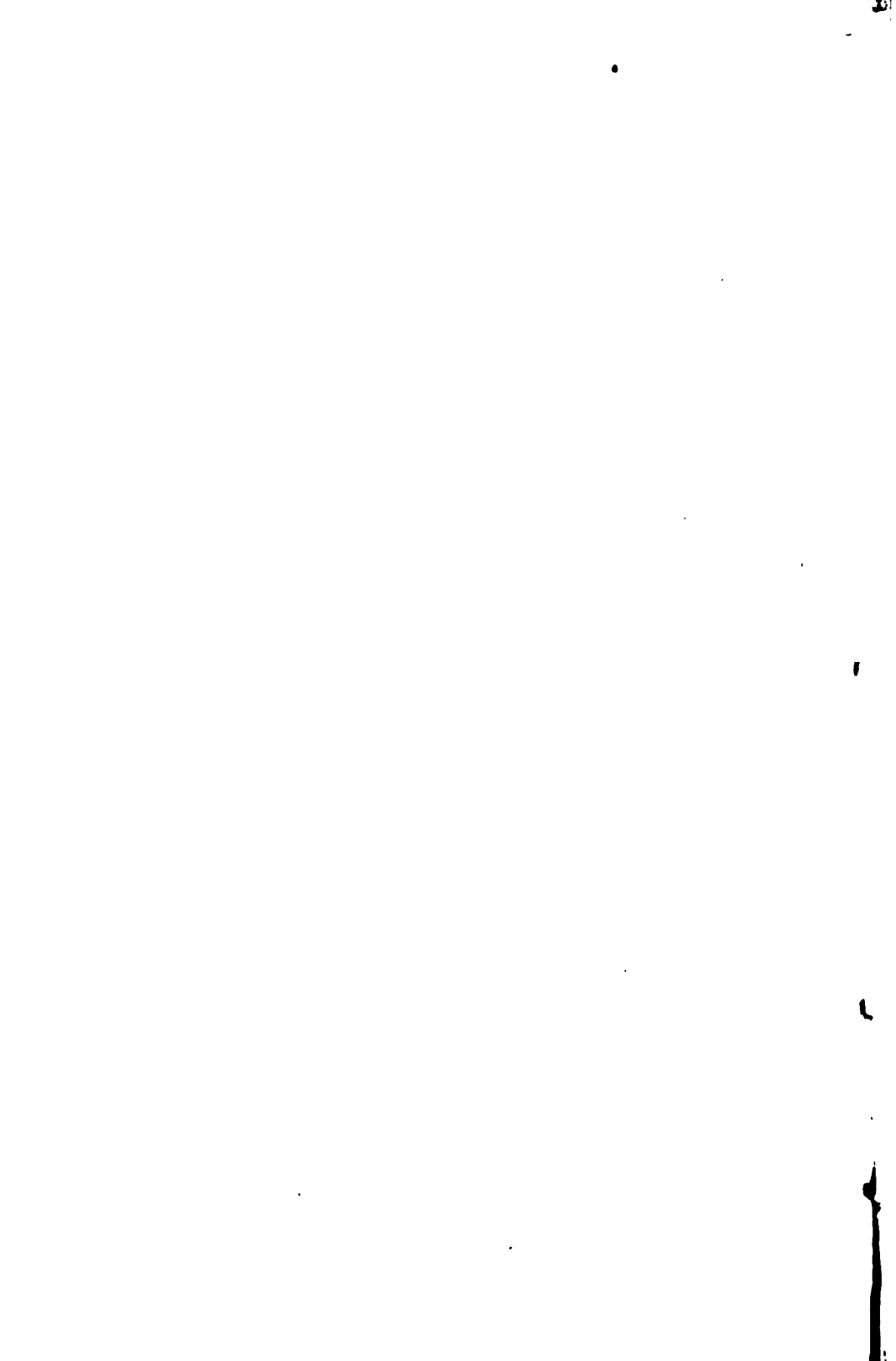






THE INCOMPARABLE SIDDONS









“ . . . indisputably the finest female portrait in the world ”

—SIR THOS. LAWRENCE TO THE R.A. STUDENTS, 1824

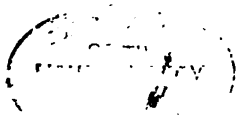
# THE INCOMPARABLE SIDDONS

BY

MRS. CLEMENT PARSONS

AUTHOR OF "GARRICK AND HIS CIRCLE"

WITH TWENTY ILLUSTRATIONS



NEW YORK: G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

LONDON: METHUEN & CO.

1909

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TO  
KATE TERRY GIELGUD  
AFFECTIONATELY

194224



## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THIS book, though certainly no conclusive 'Life,' aims at being a study of a personality, and, at the same time, a contribution towards that definitive History of the English Stage which is yet unwritten. In the case of an art that can bequeath no assurance of itself save the recorded impression created on contemporary observers, sifting and collating of descriptive notes and criticisms are peculiarly needed. From a mass of *data*, accumulated during three years' search, I have attempted to construct an image, approximately true, of the foremost example of genius in woman this country has produced, one who, in words Irving used concerning her, "helped to make the name of England illustrious throughout the world." I have tried to disentangle from her kinsfolk and fellow-artists the individual self of Sarah Siddons, and to summarise, as authentically as, at this distance of time, is possible, her style, ideals, and methods.

The sense of a woman-artist's duality, both as to life-work and character, must be present with her biographer, but, far more particularly if she was an actress, a conviction emerges of the decided extent to which the artist self impinged on the woman self. Whoever writes a great actress's memoir traces a twofold story, full of curious psychologic correlation.

The wonder is that half a dozen adequate biographies of Mrs. Siddons do not exist. Midway in her career, John Taylor, sometime an oculist, afterwards author of *Monsieur Tonson* and proprietor of *The Sun*, proposed to her to write a narrative, to date, but she discouraged the idea, apparently



from a feeling that a friend's biography of a living person is bound to appear fulsome to outsiders. Boaden was the next aspirant. Four years before the death of his 'biographee,' fifteen after her retirement, he published his earlier edition of *Memoirs of Mrs. Siddons*. No tyro at dramatic biography, he was, at the time, sixty-five—which may account for his digressions and touch of Polonius. His book has been unduly condemned, notably by Mrs. Siddons's nephew, J. M. Kemble, who wished to kick him for it, and asked W. B. Donne whether it was not "abominable that such a fellow should perfectly unauthorised sit down, to scribble on a subject of all others the most ticklish, when in addition to the drawback of knowing nothing whatever of his hero, he adds that of knowing very little more of his own language." Boaden was long-winded, and, sometimes, cryptic, as where, writing of Cumberland's *Carmelite*, he regretted that "the hideous Hildebrand alone presses the green floorcloth of dramatic expiation," but he was a sound judge of plays and playing, and he wrote like a gentleman. Turning over his pages while writing my own, I recalled North's reply to Hogg's question, "Hae ye read Boaden's *Life o' Siddons*, sir?" "I have, James—and I respect Mr. Boaden for his intelligent criticism. He is rather prosy occasionally—but why not? God knows, he cannot be more prosy than I am now at this blessed moment."

I cannot say, with Campbell, that I "applied" so arduously to write on Mrs. Siddons that my physicians "told me that unless I desisted I should sacrifice my own life to" hers. The authorised biography, dilatorily published in 1834, that cost so much travail, reflects, for the most part, its writer's inappetency. Campbell did not hold, with Cicero, that "*Vitæ bene actæ jucundissima est recordatio*." The materials for a determinate work—numerous letters, autograph Memoranda and diary—placed by Mrs. Siddons in his hands for use after her death, disappeared, under his charge, and in their place we have a piece of joyless task-work, as he himself avowed his book to be. Mrs. Jameson

greatly desired to write a biography while Mrs. Siddons's memory was yet green, but the way was jealously barred by Campbell. He, meantime, so mismanaged or neglected his material that for the most characteristic and informative of Mrs. Siddons's letters we have to turn to *Journals and Correspondence of Thomas Sedgwick Whalley*, where they are incidental, and not the staple. In our day, two works have appeared concerning Mrs. Siddons. In Mr. Percy Fitzgerald's *The Kembles*, she stands as the principal member of a distinguished family, while Mrs. Kennard's competent monograph professes only to be a brief abstract of her history.

After the lapse of three quarters of a century, biographers should tell, surely, not whatever can be told, but whatever is worth telling. To me, the majority of old playbills seem dead leaves on the Tree of Useless Knowledge, and, therefore, I have not weighted my book with the thousand obtainable details of first night dates of forgotten tragedies, the number of nights each ran, the number of Mrs. Siddons's appearances season by season, etc. These trifles form scarcely even the framework of the real *memorabilia*.

Besides thanks due to friends named elsewhere in this book, it is a great pleasure to express my indebtedness to others who have helped me, either by the loan of letters and pictures or the gift of items of out-of-the-way information. To the late Mrs. Quintin Twiss and to her family I have been specially obliged. Mr. H. G. I. Siddons, also, has elucidated for me several points of family history. I wish to record my gratitude to Mr. Oswald G. Knapp, Mr. J. H. Leigh, the Rev. N. F. Y. Kemble, Miss Gwenllian Morgan, Mrs. H. Barham Johnson, Lady Brooke, Captain Horatio Kemble, R.N., Mr. Joseph Hill, and Mr. Alfred Parsons.

Lawrence, at Dr. Whalley's request, made a delightful drawing of Cecilia Siddons, which passed into the possession of Whalley's greatnephew, the Rev. Hill Wickham, to the kindness of whose daughter, its present owner, Lady Seymour, I owe

the inclusion of a reproduction. To Mr. W. S. Brassington, Mrs. Seymour Fort, Mr. N. Beard, and Miss Mary M. Watts I am indebted for divers sorts of help. I gladly make my acknowledgments to Messrs. George Allen & Sons and to Messrs. Chatto & Windus for their courteous permission to me to quote from works published by them, also to the Editors of the *Nineteenth Century* and *Notes and Queries* for leave to quote from articles.

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## NOTICEABLE DATES IN MRS. SIDDONS'S LIFE

### GEORGE II (1727-1760)

1755. Birth of Sarah Kemble (afterwards Siddons) at Brecon.

### GEORGE III (1760-1820)

1773. Sarah Kemble married to William Siddons at Coventry.  
1774. Henry, Mrs. Siddons's eldest child, born.  
1775. Sarah Martha (Sally), her second child, born. Drury Lane engagement with Garrick.  
1776. Return to the provinces.  
1779. Maria, Mrs. Siddons's third child, born.  
1781. Frances Emilia, her fourth child, born. Dies in infancy.  
1782. Mrs. Siddons's restoration to Drury Lane and triumph there.  
1784. Reynolds exhibits Mrs. Siddons's portrait as 'The Tragic Muse.'  
1785. Mrs. Siddons first plays Lady Macbeth. George John, her fifth child, born.  
1788. Mrs. Siddons first plays Queen Katharine.  
1789. First plays Volumnia.  
1791. Drury Lane Theatre pulled down.  
1794. Holland's new Drury Lane opens with Mrs. Siddons in *Macbeth*. Cecilia, Mrs. Siddons's sixth and youngest child, born.  
1796. Kemble throws up Drury Lane Management.  
1798. Death of Maria Siddons.  
1800-1. Kemble resumes Drury Lane Management, but, failing to enter into proprietorship, goes over (1802-3) to Covent Garden, purchasing a share.  
1802. Roger Kemble dies.  
1803. Sally Siddons dies. Mrs. Siddons, having quitted Drury Lane the previous year, now commences to act at Covent Garden, but plays no new character there.  
1804. Mrs. Siddons settles at Bath.  
1805-6. Mrs. Siddons engaged at Covent Garden from now till her retirement.  
1808. Death of Mr. Siddons. Covent Garden Theatre burnt. Prince of Wales lays stone of new Covent Garden.  
1809. Drury Lane Theatre burnt. New Covent Garden opened, O.P. riots.

## **DATES AND EVENTS**

**xix**

### **THE REGENCY (1811-1820)**

1812. Mrs. Siddons's last appearances and retirement.

1815. Death of Henry Siddons.

### **GEORGE IV (1820-1830)**

### **WILLIAM IV (1830-1837)**

1831. Death of Sarah Siddons, aged seventy-six, in London.



# THE INCOMPARABLE SIDDONS

## I

### YOUNG GIRLHOOD

1755. "*July 14th Sarah Daughter of George Kemble a Comedian & Sarah his Wife was baptized.*"

**A**TTESTED by 'Thomas Bevan. Curate,' so stands, in the Register of St. Mary's Church, Brecon, the baptism certificate of Sarah Kemble, afterwards Siddons. Apparently, the curate was not sufficiently interested in the strolling Manager to set down his name, Roger Kemble, correctly.

Roger Kemble's eldest child was born, nine days before her christening, at an inn in Brecon High Street. As an inn, the Shoulder of Mutton exists no longer. The same building is now a tavern—the Siddons Wine Vaults—and, thinly lettered on an oblong white marble tablet, high above its licence inscription, is just legible—

IN THIS HOUSE

MRS. SIDDONS

WAS BORN JULY 5, 1755

The 'Siddons' has totally lost the picturesque appearance it possesses in the old drawing the Rev. Thomas Price sent Pleasures-of-Hope Campbell for Mrs. Siddons's biography. The gable has long been removed, and the timbered front buried under stucco. Beyond the 'Siddons,' Brecon may be searched in vain for traces of the divine Sarah. The font in

which she was baptized was turned out at the 'restoration' of St. Mary's, in 1858, and given to a little church in the neighbourhood, Capel St. Iltyd. The back door of the 'Siddons' opens into Church Street, through which the baby was probably taken to the north-west door of St. Mary's for her christening.

The county that also cradled Henry Vaughan, Sir Bartle Frere, and Dr. Bradley, Dean of Westminster, can only lay claim to the most intellectual actress who ever interpreted Shakespeare by the accident of birthplace. She was no more a Welshwoman than Swift was an Irishman, or Garrick a native of Hereford. On the Wiltshire border of Gloucestershire, not far from Widhill, there is a village called Kemble, and from that district living members of the Kemble 'clan' believe the family to have sprung. At the same time, the name 'Kemble,' which occurs in Domesday Book, and is traceable to the north side of the Loire, supplies another corroboration of the popular belief that for genius a strain of the Kelt is needed. Meanwhile, Hereford remains the ascertainable headquarters of Mrs. Siddons's near progenitors.

The careers of renowned players are apt to open amid an uproar of parental objections, but Sarah Kemble was bred for the stage as well as born for it. Her nursery was the improvised greenroom of the barn; most of the men and women who caressed or ignored her were players; as soon as she could commit to memory, recite, and drop a curtsy, she was led down the boards by her mother that she might help to boil the family pot by her baby graces. It is told how, at the old Brecon Theatre, on some very early occasion, of date not recoverable, when an audience signified, in the usual manner, its disapproval of the entrance of so infantile a phenomenon, Mrs. Kemble, adding to the quick-wittedness of the public performer her native decision of character, made the mite justify herself by an impromptu delivery of an apposite fable—'The Boy and the Frogs.'

"'Tis *death* to us, though *sport* to you,  
Unthinking, cruel boy!'"

tinkled forth little Miss, and the house took her to their

hearts. A certain 'Petronius Arbiter, Esq.,' alleges of one of Mrs. Siddons's foremost comic contemporaries, 'Betsey' Farren, that, as a girl, she used to transport the drum of her travelling troupe from place to place on her head. It should be explained that, to save handbill expenditure, the strolling companies announced their arrival in a fresh town by beat of drum, and if, as stated, the youngest lady really walked under the drum, when funds were too low for van hire, it is not impossible that Reynolds's Tragic Muse may have owed something of the caryatid poise of her neck to this utilitarian exercise, just as Southern peasant women owe theirs to their balanced amphoræ.

Roger Kemble was not one of those down-at-heel beings, seedy and servile, or blue-nosed and raffish, whom we call up at the word 'stroller.' Though not much of an actor, he was blessed with a sound mind, and was a man of placid, pleasant manners. His earnings averaged only £350 per annum, we are to judge from an income account of his, preserved by the first secretary of the Garrick Club, and, in part, printed by Mr. Fitzgerald (*Lives of the Kembles*, ii. 68), but the self-respect that became so dominant in the next generation was well developed in him. For all that his brother was a barber at Hereford undenied, and he himself was rumoured to have cast aside the curling-irons and combs to 'commence actor,' he liked to link himself with historic ancestors, with Captain Richard Kemble, who saved the life of Charles II by giving him his horse at the battle of Worcester, and with the Venerable Father John Kemble, described as the speaker's great-grand-uncle (after whom John Philip was, partly, it may be, named), a proscribed priest, hanged in Hereford, his county town, on August 22nd, 1679, during the Oates scare. His dismembered body was begged by Captain Kemble, who buried it at Welsh Newton, and thither, ever since, on every 22nd of August, has fared a Catholic Pilgrimage, starting from Monmouth. The hand of John Kemble is preserved, in the sacristy, at the church of St. Francis Xavier at Hereford, and a piece of linen dipped in his blood is at Downside. When summoned to execution, he asked for time to smoke a final pipe. No actor could have shown more composure. A comparison of portraits of Roger Kemble and his children with a picture derived from the pen-



and-ink sketch made of Father Kemble, in 1679, by the Governor of Hereford Gaol, shows a remarkable facial likeness, especially as to the long 'Kemble' nose.

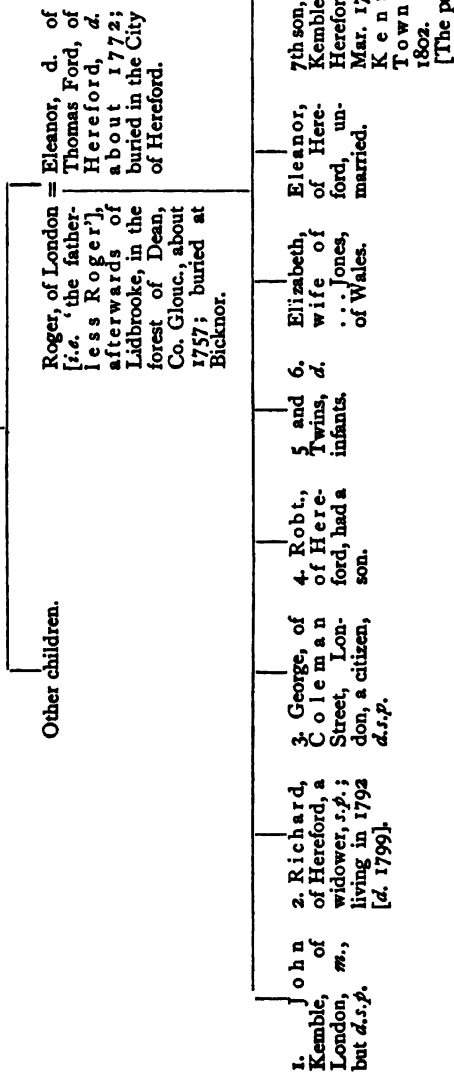
I have heard descendants of the Kemble family bewail that their efforts to trace a continuous line are baffled by 'the fatherless Roger,' *i.e.* Roger (1) the grandfather of Mrs. Siddons. If the statement be correct that Father John Kemble's nephew, the above-mentioned Captain Richard Kemble, of Pembridge Castle, Welsh Newton, Herefordshire, had three sons, George, Richard, and Roger, it is not unthinkable that this third son, Roger, may have been father of 'the fatherless Roger.' Owing to the Kemble family having been 'recusant,' no parish register helps in tracing their descent, but since, in days of Catholic disabilities and ruinous fining, it was inevitable that many members of Roman Catholic families of position should sink in the social scale, it would not be surprising to find the landowning Captain Kemble's direct and near descendant, first, a wig-maker, and, afterwards, a vagrant comedian. "Our branch of the family," said the historian, John Mitchell Kemble, elder son of Mrs. Siddons's brother, Charles, "descends from George Kemble of Pembridge Castle, as I have often heard the tradition of the family to be, and so to William of Wydell" [Widhill].

I have before me a Kemble pedigree, owned by Stephen Kemble's eldest grandson, the Rev. N. F. Y. Kemble, wherein Roger's immediate associations are thus specified (see opposite page).

There is, it must freely be confessed, such a preponderance of uncertainty in establishing any family links above Mrs. Siddons's father, that the late Mr. Knight was, for summarizing purposes, justified in his designation (in the *Dictionary of National Biography*) of this Roger as 'head of the Kemble family.'

While the fact that Mrs. Siddons's father was, in a mild way, Roman Catholic, corroborated his kinship with the confessor, Father John, his solicitude to belong to somebody gave accent to his character. From his miniature portrait in the Stratford-upon-Avon Memorial Collection we see that Sarah was featured like her father. The straight, long nose and the air of dignity came from him. James Boaden thought that Roger and his children strikingly resembled Charles the First,

... KEMBLE  
of St. Winniard's, Co. Hereford, and buried there.



1 Several eighteenth-century Kembles lie buried in St. Catharine's Chapel, Cirencester Church. Other Kembles lie buried in Tewkesbury Abbey.

but Mrs. Siddons said her father was very like George the Third, and it is hard to reconcile the two kingly likenesses. Boaden, who first met Roger Kemble when he was old enough to have 'silver curls,' found him sitting in his son John's library. "Our introduction to each other was at once simple and expressive. 'This, sir, is my father.' And, to the old gentleman, 'Allow me to present to you my friend, Mr. Boaden.'" Boaden thus inflates the simple and expressive fact that Roger Kemble was wearing a skull-cap: "From a peculiar costume that he had adopted from the liability to take cold (a partial silk covering for the head,) he looked to me rather like a dignitary of the church two centuries back, than a layman of the present age."

In common with most of the other actors of my story, Roger Kemble had the good sense to fix his affections within the profession. His wife started existence as Sarah Ward. She was the daughter of John Ward, another strolling Manager, of whose corps Roger was a member, his suit being for some time opposed by his Sarah's father. The opposition was on general, not personal, grounds, if we may at all rely on this quaint paragraph from the *Globe*, December 31st, 1807:—

"The late Mr. Ward made a solemn vow of eternal warfare against his daughter should she marry an actor. The young lady soon after married Mr. Kemble, the father of Mrs. Siddons, a gentleman for some time upon the stage. 'Well, my dear child, you have not disobeyed me, the d-v-l himself could not make an actor of your husband.'"

Variants of this story occur *passim*; unfortunately, the pleasantry is sometimes attributed, not to Ward *re* Kemble, but to Kemble *re* Siddons.

Ward, who had, as a child, played under Betterton, was the Manager who, at Stratford, in 1746, gave the benefit of *Othello* towards recolouring the chancel bust of Shakespeare, a large-minded action which, indirectly, led 'meddling' Malone, in horror at the gaudy pigments employed, to take up his whiting brush. Like his son-in-law, Ward did not fulfil the popular notion of an itinerant. In the irresponsible stage histories of his day, he is termed an Irishman—for no reason the present investigator can discover beyond the facts that he

once acted (with Miss Peg Woffington) at the Aungier Street Theatre, Dublin, and that his daughter was born at Clonmel. Actually, he and his family were well known locally as 'the Wards of Leominster,' at Leominster they were married and buried, while Roger Kemble, who 'inherited' Ward's company and circuit, made all his professional peregrinations in the western midlands, between such places as Coventry, Warwick, Worcester, Droitwich, Bewdley, Stourbridge, Wolverhampton, Shrewsbury, and Ludlow, with, as we have seen, a reach across the marches of Wales. On the tomb, dated 1773, below which lie Ward's bones, 'waiting for our Saviour's great Assize' (and never did an epitaph better represent the Georgian religious tone), the defunct is 'John Ward, Gent.' Close by his are the graves of his near relatives, Thomas and Humphrey Ward, the first a 'sincere Christian' of 'talents greatly successful,' the second, and earlier (born, 1705), something more, it would appear, than technically a stroller, since his inscription reads,

"Stop traveller  
I've past and repast seas and distant lands  
Can find no rest but in my Saviour's hands."

Mrs. Roger Kemble proved herself a fine, old-fashioned, Biblical mother. She brought her husband (as the phrase was) four sons and eight girls. The girls, according to the rule the more insistent religion no longer tolerates, were bred Protestants, the boys to the faith of their father. John Philip Kemble, intended for the priesthood, received his later education at Douai, in the still existing English Benedictines' College for the training of English priests,—it had been the ancestral Father Kemble's seminary,—and thither, at John Philip's charges, sixteen years afterwards, went his brother, Charles.

Circumlocutory Boaden, publishing Mrs. Siddons's memoirs during her lifetime, remarks: "Mrs. Siddons, I have always understood to be senior to her brother, Mr. Kemble, by two years." John was born in Lancashire, at Prescott, probably the most outlying of the company's pitches. Charles, the Kembles' eleventh and penultimate child, and the only other who at all approached Sarah and John in brain power, came into the world, at Brecon, twenty years later than his eldest

sister. The entry of his baptism, too, is in the Register of St. Mary's Church, and he also was baptized in the now cast-out font. It is noticeable that the indisputable genius was the eldest, the next in talent the second—an instance to be cited in opposition to those theorists who maintain that the star of a large family always comes midway in the list.

Fortunately for her player-husband, Mrs. Roger Kemble was a woman who put her best foot foremost, and took bulls by their horns. 'The old lioness,' Lawrence, who painted her portrait, used to call her, anticipating Thackeray's 'grand old lioness,' to describe her grandchild, Fanny, Charles Kemble's elder daughter, who believed she bore a strong resemblance to the Kemble grandmother she never saw. She, by the way, suggested that Mrs. Roger was a Volumnia of real life to the Coriolanus of her son, John, to whom, quite in the spirit of this, we elsewhere read of her saying, "Sir, you are as proud as Lucifer!"

Mrs. Kemble instilled into Sarah her own clear-cut articulation—each syllable round and distinct; she taught her singing and the harpsichord; she vetoed Roger's engagement of an out-at-elbows eccentric, William Combe, the future author of 'Dr. Syntax,' to coach her in elocution. She was no dragger-up of children, but a vigorous, purposeful, probably unimaginative *mère de famille*. She died in 1806, aged seventy-one. Roger Kemble died in 1802, aged eighty-one. They both could remember having acted with Quin.

Kemble and his wife did their best to provide the two-thirds of their children who survived the perils of eighteenth-century infancy with all the schooling attainable in untoward circumstances. Migratory players' families were as liable to missing the three R's as canal people's, but wherever the Kemble cart made a protracted halt a school was sought out. At Worcester, a Mrs. Harris, who ruled over a certain Thornlea House, gave the little Sarah lessons free of charge. Mrs. Harris's other young ladies were prepared to make the stroller's child feel her position, but her magnificent usefulness on an occasion of school theatricals, and her talent for improvising sacque-backs for them all, out of grocers' stiff sugar paper, converted her into their heroine. We may wonder whether the day-girls brought her,



ROGER KEMBLE



in tribute, those 'Worcester fat cakes' of which, forty years after, she fondly remembered she 'could have eaten half a dozen' at a sitting.

This Thornlea House note is one of the only two attainable 'traits' of Mrs. Siddons's childhood. The other is in a different key, and, to the reader disposed to take more interest in her as a human character than as an actress, will appear even more significant of things to come. It narrates how she retired to rest one night, so absorbed in the hope of 'a pleasure party' next day, which was to include the wearing of a beatific, brand-new, pink, or, as they said then, pink-coloured gown (the skirt of which, *circa* 1765, we may picture as pleated in thickly round a long, pointed bodice), that she took with her to bed the Book of Common Prayer opened at the Prayer for fair Weather. At dawn, she was waked by a deluge against her window. She looked down at her *sortes*. The Prayer for Rain obstinately confronted her. Instead of tossing the talisman out of bed, she re-marked the petition near to her heart, and addressed her again to sleep. Her next experience was sunshine at rising and the pink-coloured gown. It seems singular that both these glimpses into Mrs. Siddons's child-life should concern clothes, seeing that she eventually became a careless dresser. We can better trace in her renewed trial of the cross-grained Prayer Book a foretaste of the tenacity, and, also, of the temperance—the composure—of her adult character.

There can hardly be another instance of the childhood of a genius who belongs to the modern world which offers so little as Sarah Kemble's in satisfaction of our hunger for anecdote. What is not an anecdote, but illustrative, all the same, is the record of the early commencement of her lifelong devotion to Milton. She told Campbell that when she was ten she used to pore over *Paradise Lost* 'for hours together.' It is pleasant to think of the serious little girl—this Catholic strolling actor's child—responding to the great Puritan's austere elevation.

By the time she was eleven, Sarah was playing in Shakespeare-cum-Dryden and Davenant's *Tempest*, as Ariel, Chief Spirit;<sup>1</sup> in Havard's *King Charles the First*, as the young

<sup>1</sup> At Worcester, April 16th, 1767, Mrs. Siddons's first recorded Shakespearean appearance.



Princess Elizabeth; in English operas, such as *Love in a Village*, in which she played Rosetta; in Murphy's *Grecian Daughter*, where, tradition states, she laughed at the supremely tragic moment; and in *The Padlock*, as Leonora. A contributor to *Notes and Queries* of April 5th, 1862, speaks of having seen a playbill of the theatre at Kington, Hereford, where Roger was Manager (and where, in 1758, his son Stephen was born), "in which the famous tragic actress is advertised to take the part of Patty in *The Maid of the Mill*." The apt girl was juvenile lead in the family company, and no longer had time to beat the snuffers against the candlestick to suggest the sound that should have been made by the windmill on the scene, which, in her splendid days, Combe, her intercepted professor, talking to Samuel Rogers, maliciously emphasised as her early employment. At Wolverhampton, Worcester, and, no doubt, elsewhere, Roger Kemble evaded the responsibility of conducting a theatrical entertainment without a licence by the celebrated advertisement that the 'Concert'—in three parts—was free, but that 'a quantity of Tooth-powder (from London)' was to be sold at various agencies, in papers at 2s., 1s., or 6d. Very likely, Sarah's rosy fingers helped to do up those chalk-filled packets.

Lamb's friend, that Cobbett-like writer, Thomas Holcroft, was, for some time, an assistant in the Kemble company. Holcroft's theatrical experiences occurred midway between his nomadic and horsy youth and his play-writing and Radical maturity. At this stage of his career, as we learn from John Bernard's *Retrospections of the Stage*, he knew too little of spelling and grammar to write a passable letter, yet his self-confidence enabled him to apply 'for an engagement, embracing every good part in the cast-book.' He joined the Kembles in circumstances calculated to prejudice him against them. He had tramped, hungry, and, as the phrase went, completely *minus*, from Leeds. On his arrival at Hereford, failing to find the Manager, upon whose delayed letter to him of five weeks earlier he had undertaken his journey, he was directed to Kemble's brother, the barber. The barber and the barber's wife and family were all indoors. They commented on his faint and broken appearance, suffered him to tell his story, and, at its

conclusion, did not even offer to fill him out a glass of ale. This meanness, he says in his *Memoirs*, made 'Mr Kemble's company of Comedians,' when they heard of it, 'not a little incensed.'

As Holcroft joined the Kembles not earlier than 1771, he may never have acted with Mrs. Siddons. She married in 1773, and thereupon returned to the company, but for the two previous years she was away at Guy's Cliffe. It is hardly thinkable that, had he acted with the queen rosebud, Holcroft should not, later, have mentioned the fact. His reminiscences were rather with the inconspicuous of the company, and concentrated themselves on a wastrel named Downing or Dunning, whose trollopy wife habitually stood behind the scenes, with a powder-puff, ready to rewhiten her George's too rubicund nose each time he came off.

Under date February 12th, 1767, the playbill of *King Charles the First*, at the Worcester 'Theatre,'—a stable in the back yard of the King's Head Inn, opposite the Town Hall,—contains a line of anticipatory interest:—

"*Duke of Richmond, Mr. Siddons.*"

Thus early, William Siddons (who took to the shifting stage as more to his taste than being a barber's apprentice, his first way of life) was a member of Kemble's company. Not till three years later did he stand confessed as a serious *soupirant* for the Manager's lovely daughter.

Siddons was a Walsall man. Mr. Joseph Hall, of Perry Bar, has discovered for me, at St. Matthew's (the parish church), Walsall, his baptismal entry, as follows:—

"1744. Sept. 24. *William Siddons son of Joseph.*"

In vol. ii. (published 1801) of the Rev. Stebbing Shaw's *History and Antiquities of Staffordshire*, under 'Walsall,' we read that William Siddons's father kept a public-house (the 'London Apprentice') in Rushall Street, "and met with his death in sparring or wrestling with one Denston." The future husband of England's greatest actress is first heard of, theatrically, as performing, as an amateur, in 1766, in a play, 'in the malt-house of Mr. Samuel Wood on the Lime-pit bank,' Walsall. The name 'Siddons' is extant in Birmingham, Oundle, and Wellingborough.

As we know, Sarah returned William's flame. Only less remarkable than the slow development of her art was the precociousness of her womanly maturity. Bohemian circumstances joined to a familiar acquaintance with the speech of heroines make a girl a Juliet. She engaged herself to Siddons when she was sixteen. He was eleven years older.

Sarah Siddons's first love-affair was the love-affair of her life. She was too young wooed and too early married to have had much previous time for the occupation later known in her own domestic circle as conquest-making, but the characteristic fact is that—actress, popular idol, beautiful woman though she was, she never, after marriage, drifted into attachment to any one of the various men who might so easily have come to interest her more than Siddons. From being a maid she became a matron, but as for embroideries on either theme, would as soon have taken up with morpho-mania. Acting and the austere joys of maternity were the all-sufficient emotional outlets of this rarely constituted woman-artist. The little development in her of the sexual element is a most noteworthy fact, seeing that *a great actress, a great courtesan*, is the generalisation to which theatrical history largely leads. To be a great actress, most people would say, a woman must be *plus femme que les autres femmes*. The constant display and constantly realised effect of personal charms, the perpetual, high-wrought emotionalism, what the late Mr. Marion Crawford termed the 'overpowering familiarities' of the stage, all point one way. Yet, to this forceful stream of tendency Mrs. Siddons was a grand exception. Of the libertinism which so often accompanies the artist that it seems almost a necessary element in genius she knew nothing. It was only a Glasgow enthusiast, ignorant of everything but the effect on his nerves of her acting, who could say of her, "She is a fallen angel!" At the farthest remove from the more or less typical La Faustin of Edmond de Goncourt, she presents, indeed, a curious and instructive phenomenon, *i.e.* a woman of essentially Puritan nature, into which genius, that mighty wind, blowing where it listeth, inspired an unparalleled gift for acting.

The girl's course of love did not run smooth. Siddons was handsome and looked quite the gentleman, and, by virtue of these qualifications, played utility in Kemble's company—

Seneca was not too heavy, nor Plautus too light. He possessed another useful asset in that he had a particularly quick study. He could cram any part, however long, and be 'rotten perfect' in a day. Beyond these three points in his favour, he had nothing to offer, and Mr. and Mrs. Kemble took no joy in an engagement they did not well know how to prevent between their unpractised young beauty and this moneyless swain. Had they recognised in him any promise of a second Powell, or a second 'Gentleman' Smith, they might have taken heart, but they knew too much about acting for that. He, meanwhile, deep in love, did not trouble about the misgivings of his fair one's encumbrances.

At this juncture, there emerged out of a cloud of Breconshire admirers, one, Mr. Evans, with, it was understood, the proposals of a solid and eligible passion. In Brecon, the general opinion was that he had been bowled over by Sarah's rendering of Leonora's song to her bird in *The Padlock*—

"No, no, no,  
Sweet Robin, you shall not go;  
Where, you wanton, could you be  
Half so happy as with me?"

Evans belonged, in a small way, to the landed class. He had £300 a year, and was designated Squire of Pennant. Upon his appearance, Mr. and Mrs. Kemble must be supposed to have given their daughter a vivid sketch of the difference between £300 a year certain and nothing a year certain, for Siddons, fearing the worst, proposed elopement. Sarah characteristically declined such a step. The dimness that veils every incident of her youth here becomes opaque, and it is impossible to know whether, at this point, she did not waver in favour of Evans. At least, Siddons thought she did. Bitterness overflowed his heart, and he rushed to her parents, and expressed with freedom what he thought of them. In reply, Kemble gave him notice, tempering the dismissal by allowing him a farewell benefit.

Siddons retired to meditate an immense revenge. It took the form of an *entr'acte imprévu*, composed by himself. This he delivered at the above-mentioned benefit (which proved a bumper) between the play and the farce. We owe the disinter-

ment of the words of Siddons's 'song' to 'Carnhuanawc' Price, who delivered them to the delighted Campbell, who said they were worth their weight in five-pound notes. They, at any rate, showed that Siddons had a long way yet to go before he could behave like the gentleman he looked. They commenced,

"Ye ladies of Brecon, whose hearts ever feel  
For wrongs like to this I'm about to reveal:  
Excuse the first product, nor pass unregarded  
The complaints of poor Colin, a lover *discarded*.

"At length the report [of Squire Evans's adoration] reach'd the  
ears of his flame,  
Whose nature he fear'd from the source whence it came;  
She acquainted her ma'a, who, her ends to obtain,  
Determin'd poor Colin to drive from the plain."

There were nine more verses, and they all rhymed. Throughout his life, Siddons had a readiness at *vers d'occasion*.

The canticle was in egregiously bad taste, but poor Colin, standing down at the floats, with, we may be sure, his fair face deeply flushed with agitation, was in earnest. Sentiment, persecuted by worldly wisdom, is a safe theatrical stop, and the Breconians, already hugely interested in the affair, and with all an audience's fine carelessness as to a matter touching themselves so little as the financial irresponsibility of an actress's would-be husband, applauded him vociferously. But, as Colin went off the stage, trailing clouds of glory, an anticlimax occurred. Mrs. Kemble met him at the greenroom door, and Colin was clouted. Boxing ears was, at that period, the recognised expression of feminine disapprobation.

The fact of Siddons being thus finally presented with the key of the street either did nothing to encourage the Squire of Pennant Sarah's Protestant to be, or, if it did, he was refused. Mrs. Kennard thinks Sarah was unnaturally tolerant in clinging to a sweetheart who had sung concerning her

"a jilt is the devil, as has long been confess'd,  
Which a heart like poor Colin's must ever detest,"

but, clearly, she forgave him for the excellent reason that love for her had turned his brain—*amantes, amentes*. We others may rejoice that, by remaining staunch to her poor player,

instead of showing herself a girl of spirit, she was not untimely torn from her vocation as the queen of tragedy to become instead a queen of curds and cream, as wife to an agricultural Welshman.

No doubt, there were tears, headaches, and words. It ended, for the time being, in Sarah's accepting a situation, at £10 a year, in the service of Lady Mary Greatheed, of Guy's Cliffe, Warwick. The engagement between herself and her sweet William was ratified. Her parents, though retiring in good order, had been beaten. Such is nature's kindly law.

Lady Mary Greatheed, the widow of Samuel Greatheed, M.P. for Coventry (*ob.* 1765), was born Lady Mary Bertie, a daughter of Peregrine, second Duke of Ancaster. Her son, Bertie Greatheed, was eleven in 1771. It was this son's granddaughter, Anne Caroline Greatheed, whose marriage, in 1823, with Lord Charles Percy, son of the first Earl of Beverley, eventually brought the Guy's Cliffe property into the hands of its present owner, the Duke of Northumberland's brother, Lord Algernon Percy, to whose kindness in showing me various Kemble relics and pictures I am much indebted. It remains hard to say precisely what duties Sarah Kemble was originally engaged to fulfil in the Greatheed household. In the family to-day it is believed that her employment was that of reader, or companion-reader, and, in all probability, it was into the congenial specialty of reading aloud that she drifted; but, in view of the fact that Bertie Greatheed told Miss Williams Wynn he had 'been in the habit of hearing Mrs. Siddons read *Macbeth* even from the period of her being his mother's maid,' we may perhaps suppose that she entered on her duties in the elastic capacity of maid-companion, but that her brains and refinement soon caused the companion to predominate over the tirewoman. We know that she constantly read her beloved Milton to the Greatheeds, and we can guess what a brave new world their many books opened to her. Not the least interesting of the few records of this early connection of hers with Guy's Cliffe is a remark Lady Mary Greatheed made to 'Conversation' Sharp to the effect that she used always to feel an irresistible inclination to rise from her chair when her queenly-looking dependent entered the room. The Duchess of Ancaster told the Rev. John Genest

that, when Lady Mary stayed with her in Lincolnshire, she brought Mrs. Siddons with her, and the *ci-devant* young actress "was fond of spouting in the servants' hall." The third Duke, then Lord Brownlow Bertie, used to listen to her, and used, also, presumably, to bring enthusiastic reports into the drawing-room, for Lady Mary said, "Brother, don't encourage the girl, you will make her go on the stage."

It is interesting to speculate on what so impossible a 'young female' as Sarah Kemble learnt from the serene orderliness of her surroundings at Lady Mary's. The glitter of the table silver must have meant a new standpoint, the mouldings of the doors should have been a liberal education. There was much in her temperament that responded to the new atmosphere, and, while, in years to come, she was to grow intimately familiar with many of the stately homes of England, now, manifestations of wealth and taste and high position were rendered trebly telling by their contrast to the scrambling existence—sordid lodgings, ill-bred associates, and many mortifications—that made up, not only life's daily portion in a strolling Manager's family, but all she had hitherto known of the world.

Of the romantic beauty of the Guy's Cliffe estate many a better poet had sung before that genuine admirer of 'elegant nature,' the Rev. Richard Jago, who visited at the house during Mrs. Siddons's period, discovered that

"Here the calm scene lulls the tempestuous breast  
To sweet composure."

At this 'Place meet for the Muses,'<sup>1</sup> in 1772, Miss Kemble may well have sat at a mullioned upper window, as she did, thirty years later, at Conway Castle—there, too, the river, beneath, 'glowing in the balmy sunshine—till [the quoted words are from her devoted Patty Wilkinson's travel diary] she seemed absorbed in a luxuriant reverie.' The thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts, and Sarah's at Guy's Cliffe were a chaos of simmering artistic impulses blent with tenderness for a man, whom she saw on a glorified plane, as actors are seen across the lamps. So foolish is a girl that one must be certainly right in imagining that Sarah's happiest moments in this

<sup>1</sup> So Leland described Guy's Cliffe (*The Itinerary*, iv. Part the Second).



GUY'S CLIFFE





picturesque place were when Siddons (entering by the back door) came to visit her, and they could stroll to the mill, or, under the great cedars, to Guy's Cave above the mirroring Avon, and laugh over their ancient misunderstanding, and drink together at the wishing spring to the golden age, ahead, of mutual happiness one and indivisible.

About two years passed before the day arrived when Sarah bade a respectful farewell to the mistress who had treated her with uniformly cordial encouragement. Little could either foresee how, within a comparatively brief period, relative positions would alter, and how the heir of that lordly house would, one day, tremblingly offer his tragedy to 'his mother's maid,' and be described by her as the 'poor young man.'

On November 26th, 1773, William Siddons and Sarah Kemble, the latter then eighteen, became, in Sir Peter Teazle's phrase, involved in matrimony. The ceremony took place in Trinity Church, Coventry; Roger gave his daughter away; and, no doubt, the pew-opener agreed with the clerk that the bride and bridegroom were an uncommonly well-matched couple.

No unobstructed horizon lay before Sarah and her 'Sid.' It was arranged that, at any rate for awhile, they should both resume work on the Kemble circuit, and Sarah was, for the first time, announced as 'Mrs. Siddons,' on a Worcester playbill, December 13th, 1773.

## II

### FALSE DAWN

**I**N the spring of 1775, Mrs. Siddons was acting, with Younger's company, in Liverpool. "Have you ever heard," inquired Garrick, writing, in April, to the ideal stage Irishman, John Moody, at Liverpool, "of a woman Siddons, who is strolling about somewhere near you?"

To be continually on the look-out for new blood is part of the art of Management, and Garrick had his spies and critics always ready to run down, sometimes to unlikely places, to report on the likely article. There was a William Stone at Drury Lane Theatre whom he so habitually employed in recruiting about London for subordinate actors that the fellow acquired the *sobriquet* of The Theatrical Crimp. The same office, in a higher walk, was fulfilled by several people.

Garrick had first heard the name of the 'woman Siddons' from the Countess of Albany's cousin, Lord Bruce, in 1776 created Earl of Ailesbury. In 1774, the married adventurers, William and Sarah Siddons, were acting at Cheltenham Wells, during the water-drinking season, with Chamberlain and Crump's company, of which Siddons appears to have been, at the time, part Manager. Their appointments were, in all probability, extremely humble. When that extraordinary creature, 'Becky' Wells, played a star engagement at Cheltenham, in 1789, she descanted on the contrast between that and her former theatrical visit there; then, she had arrayed herself for Juliet in an actresses' dressing-room only divided from the actors' by a torn blanket.

One evening, Lord Bruce and his stepdaughter, the Hon. Henrietta Boyle, turned in to the Cheltenham Theatre in a mood of indulgent good humour. The play was Otway's

*Venice Preserved*, and the well-versed pair expected, at best, to enjoy a suppressed smile out of the antics and mouthings of the poor creatures behind the floats. They proved themselves unprejudiced enough to acknowledge a good thing when they found it. Indeed, Miss Boyle cried so hard over the pathos and tenderness of one young *tragédienne*, Siddons by name, that the sound of her sobs convinced that sensitive actress she was being tittered at, and sent her home in an agony of vexation.

Next morning, Lord Bruce, walking in Cheltenham, met William Siddons. He bowed to the actor, and then accosted him, actors being public property, with a few well-chosen words of compliment—and what words of compliment from a noble lord would have seemed other than well-chosen?—on Mrs. Siddons's beautiful acting, after which he begged for his daughter the pleasure of waiting on Mrs. Siddons at her lodgings. Quick and self-reliant, Miss Boyle at once discovered that, under the shabby surroundings of this obscure *première*, she had lighted upon a lady in grain. The two made friends. Mrs. Siddons—I quote a serious work on the girlhood of extraordinary women, published in 1857—"was naturally greatly lifted up by the praise of honourable and noble persons, whose rank was a sure guarantee of the soundness of their judgment." Miss Boyle lent Mrs. Siddons finery, imparted the latest ideas on *chiffons*, herself ran together stage-costume adornments. When next in London, Lord Bruce took an opportunity of naming their Cheltenham Belvidera to Garrick, as a diamond in a dust-heap, a dove trooping with crows. We know enough of him whom friends called the great little man, and enemies the little great man, to be sure that the fact that she had been recommended by a peer engraved all the more deeply the new name of Siddons in Garrick's mental notebook. As a newspaper correspondent phrases it, writing, in 1823, to the editor of the *Courier*, "The late Earl of Aylesbury excited Garrick's earnest attention."

For all his charming deference to aristocratic acquaintances, our David was not the man to rely for a final artistic opinion, involving his subsequent cash and credit, on any one but himself, or another stage expert. As a matter of fact, and without counting Moody, referred to above, he employed two experts

on the Siddons quest. One was Tom King, who saw her, at Cheltenham, as Calista, in Rowe's *The Fair Penitent*, and reported enthusiastically. The other was the Rev. Henry Bate, who did not see her till some months later, when Garrick was sighing for a new sultana to correct the caprices of Mesdames Abington, Yates, and Younge.

Parson Bate, J.P., M.F.H., who edited the *Morning Post*, and was, as the ever delightful Boaden remarks, 'lay in his manners,' has never been accused of lacking brains, and the two letters he wrote to Garrick, on August 12th and 19th, 1775, from the Hop-pole, Worcester, giving his impressions of Mrs. Siddons's extraordinariness and Mr. Siddons's ordinariness, are much to the point. He was accompanied on his quest by Mrs. Bate, 'whose judgment in theatrical matters,' he writes, he has 'a high opinion of.' This was the lady of whom Gainsborough made the portrait (*Lady Bate Dudley*) which, lent by the late Lord Burton, formed one of the greater glories of the British Fine Art Section in the Franco-British Exhibition, 1908. Her husband's portrait, by Gainsborough, hangs in Room XX of the National Gallery.

Bate tells Garrick that Mrs. Siddons—as Rosalind—was not only beautiful and original (yet tempered by an unremitting regard for the moderation of nature) but that 'in the latter humbug scene with Orlando' she 'did more with it' than any one he ever saw, 'not even your divine Mrs. Barry excepted.' Truth compels him to say he thought her voice dissonant, even grating; he is, at the same time, inclined to think this only an error of affectation, for he 'found it wear away as the business became more interesting.' So conquered is the critic that he goes on, "I should not wonder, from her ease, figure, and manner, if she made the proudest *she* of either house tremble in genteel comedy—nay, beware yourself, *Great Little Man*, for she plays Hamlet to the satisfaction of the Worcestershire critics." He adds that, as there must be no thought of not engaging her, he has taken the initial steps, since he 'learnt that some of the Covent Garden Mohawks were intrenched near the place, and intended carrying her by surprise.' He says that the couple are eagerly ready to put themselves under Garrick's protection, but that the lady 'declined proposing any terms, leaving it entirely with you.' Bate winds up by apologising for having

written, he supposes, 'a damned jargon of unintelligible stuff in haste.'

Garrick's reply—which I have only seen in print, as a newspaper cutting from an ancient number of the *Courier*—is, for its writer's sake and its rarity, worth transcribing. I omit two or three sentences, in which Roscius inquires, in terms too unmuffled for modern eyes, concerning Mrs. Siddons's approaching confinement (her first child, Henry, was now ten months old), desiring to know at what date she will again be 'fit for service.'

"HAMPTON, August 15, 1775

"DEAR BATE,—Ten thousand thanks for your very clear, agreeable, and friendly letter: it pleased me much, and whoever calls it *a jargon of unintelligible stuff*, should be knocked down if I were near him. I must desire you to secure the lady, with my best compliments, and that she may depend upon every reasonable encouragement in my power; at the same time, you must intimate to the husband, that he must be satisfied with the *State of life in which it has pleased Heaven to call her*. . . . Should not you get some memorandum signed by her and her husband, and of which I will send a fac-simile copy to them, and a frank, if you will let me know their address.

"I laughed at the military stratagems of the Covent Garden Generals, whilst I had your genius to [?] them. If she has merit (as I am sure by your letter she must have) and will be wholly governed by me, I will make her theatrical fortune; if any lady begins to play tricks, I will immediately play off my masked battery of Siddons against her. I should be glad to know her cast of parts, or rather what parts she has done, and in what she likes herself *best*. Those I would have marked . . .

"I am, my dear Farmer,<sup>1</sup> most sincerely yours,

"D. GARRICK"

Four days later, Bate sent Garrick a list of Mrs. Siddons's twenty-three leading characters. Of the seven she herself preferred, three were tragic, and four comic. Among the latter were Portia and Rosalind. She did not mark her two tragic Shakespearean parts, Juliet and Cordelia. Bate added, "It would be unjust not to remark one circumstance in favour of them both; I mean the universal good character they have

<sup>1</sup> In reference to Bate's agricultural proclivities.

preserved here." In a postscript, he subjoins, "She is the most extraordinary quick study I ever heard of."

The negotiations went forward. The Siddonses gave notice at their headquarters. Garrick advanced money to tide them over the forthcoming illness and any short period in London before appearance.

None of the Garrick-Bate letters appear in *The Private Correspondence of David Garrick*, edited by Boaden in 1831. The only document bearing on the transaction to be found there is a letter to William Siddons, dated December 13th, 1775, from John de la Bere, reporting to him the indignation of 'Mr. Blackwell' and 'the gentlemen of Covent-garden theatre' at Mrs. Siddons's having engaged herself to Garrick after having been previously in treaty with them for the latter part of the winter season. "They consider her subsequent engagement to Mr. Garrick as an infringement of the agreement subsisting between them and Drury-lane." From this it would appear that some sort of stipulation existed between the two 'Winter Theatres' (*i.e.* Drury Lane and Covent Garden) as to not infringing on each other's overtures to actors while such overtures were proceeding. The letter concludes: "I have only to recommend it to your consideration, whether you will not, on the footing of the agreement between the two houses, lose the chance of getting into either, and to add that Mr. Blackwell has taken up this affair with great resolution, on the part of Covent-garden, and he says that Mrs. Siddons absolutely promised him to drop all thoughts of connecting herself with Drury-lane." Clearly, Mrs. Siddons's acting had made a sensation, and, equally clearly, the Siddons pair had not been guiltless of sitting on the fence between the Lane and the Garden.

It had been calculated that Mrs. Siddons would be 'fit for service' early in December, and, on November 9th, her husband acquainted their prospective employer that, on the 5th inst., she had 'produc'd him a fine girl.' The twenty-year-old wage-earner was taken ill while acting, at Gloucester, a few hours previously. Had a longer reposeful time followed, the story of her first siege of London might possibly have been other than it was.

The two probationers, accompanied by two babies 'off their feet,' little Henry and the 'fine girl,' Sarah Martha—later, the 'Sally' Siddons of a tragic real-life story—reached London before the middle of December. Mrs. Siddons felt she was on the first rung of the ladder. The agreement was informal, but Garrick promised her five pounds a week, a salary which, before she began to draw it, must have appeared to her a Golconda. Unfortunately, more than a third of the season was over.

Boaden tells a weak-kneed story to the effect that, prior to her marriage, she had journeyed to London, and recited to Garrick from Rowe's tragedy, *Jane Shore*. This statement is uncorroborated, and, as to date, improbable. Quite possibly, now, on her enrolment in his corps, the patentee, at their initial meeting, asked for a taste of her quality, and was given some speeches of Jane Shore's or Alicia's. It would be hard to imagine a prettier subject for a *genre* painting than the first interview between Mrs. Siddons and Garrick.

"His praises were most liberally conferred upon me," wrote Mrs. Siddons, long years afterwards, in the autograph Memoranda she bequeathed to Campbell. It would not, one imagines, have taken the oracle—as she called Garrick—many minutes to find out various facts about her, besides the obvious one that she was (in Johnson's phrase) towering in confidence of twenty-one. Except electricity, nothing is more rapid than an experienced actor's recognition of the professional standard.

Garrick selected for Mrs. Siddons's début an important, if, to a pathetic actress, not very grateful, Shakespearean part, Portia. It was, at least, one that Bate had underlined at her request, a strange fact, since there was no scope for passion in it. Later, she herself realised the deficiency of the rôle—and grumbled at Garrick for imposing it on her. There can be little doubt that, before she came to London, and while she stayed in London, she was accounted, and accounted herself, on the whole, a comedy rather than a tragedy actress. King was her Shylock, and Tom Davies's 'very pretty wife' her Nerissa. The play was given on a Friday,—December 29th, 1775—and on the bill Mrs. Siddons appeared as 'a Young Lady (being her first appearance).'

The poor girl was found wanting. She tottered and



trembled, and her voice could not get over the footlights. Inadequacy seemed to stand confest. By the Trial scene, she had somewhat rallied, but still her tones were so weak as often to be inaudible—a defect that must have been fatal to the confident, declamatory style playgoers associate with that special ‘bit of fat,’ the Quality of Mercy speech. Next day, with the exception of Bate, or his mouthpiece, in the *Morning Post*, the critics, to a man, condemned her. Woodfall’s paper, the *Morning Chronicle*, advised her ‘to throw more fire and spirit into her performance,’ the *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* found her, on account of ‘monotony’ and of ‘a vulgarity in her tones,’ ill calculated to ‘sustain that line in a theatre she has at first been held forth in.’ The utmost praise of her acting to which her part discoverer, Bate, ventured now to commit the *Morning Post* was a vague opinion that ‘her FORTE seems to be that of enforcing the beauties of her author by an emphatic though easy art, almost peculiar to herself.’ Her painful timidity, the quality of all others embarrassing to an audience assembled for enjoyment, was dwelt on by all.

Had the ‘Diurnal Writers’ of 1775 appreciated the obstacles against which the debutant laboured, one of them, perhaps, might have thought her worth a word of encouragement. She was in feeble health—a seven-weeks’ mother. Except for what natural genius had taught her, she was an unlessoned girl, unschooled in the endless fine shades of those trained artists, the *sociétaires* of Drury Lane. Lastly, she was already writhing under the jealous disdain of the regnant queens of the green-room. *Who was this raw nobody, that she should have a Shakespearean heroine’s part? Poor, dear Mr. Garrick must be growing reckless on the eve of his retirement—at any rate, extremely ill-judged. And, oh la, what clothes! For Portia, a faded, salmon-coloured sacque and coat—salmon-coloured, forsooth, and obviously second-hand. Did Mr. Bensley or Mr. Brereton murmur ‘elegant figure’? Yes—well—it never would have occurred to them. There was no brilliancy, no style, no je ne sçais quoi—and each fair one looked still more conscious as she contributed her self-descriptive term. Indeed—and to drop a totally uninteresting subject—the sooner the poor thing trundled back to her barns, the better—they had no wish to detain her. Such was the attitude of*

sister-women. The aggrieved ladies called her 'Garrick's Venus,' and on whichever noun they placed the accent, we may imagine the title received additional sting.

She was 'Venus' because, on her first night, and, again, later, she walked in that character in the afterpiece, 'the Jubilee,' a replica of the pageant arranged for Garrick's Shakespeare Festival at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1769, and abandoned there, on account of disastrous weather. As a revival, on the boards in London, 'the Jubilee' was a big success, in spite of the objections made by the leading members of the company to demeaning themselves by walking as the mere 'shadows' of Shakespearean characters that some of them had never even been associated with. It was in the last scene of this revival that the 'Ladies, worthy creatures!' as William, better known as 'Gentleman,' Smith ironically calls them in a letter to Garrick, tried to block out Venus from the sight of the audience, while Garrick (smilingly, we may be sure) frustrated their intentions by deliberately leading her down to the front of the stage. Little Tom Dibdin was Venus's Cupid, whom to keep of a cheerful countenance Mrs. Siddons bribed with a promise of sugarplums at the fall of the curtain. While Tom was away, not well (whether from digestive upset consequent on the sugarplums is not stated) a Master Mills personated Cupid. "I could have killed that boy," says Dibdin. However, when he returned, Mrs. Siddons comforted him by saying, "I did not like Master Mills so well as I do you." The first words Dibdin heard Mrs. Siddons utter, "Ma'am, could you favour me with a pin?" were addressed to Mrs. Garrick's maid, when one of Cupid's wings dropped off.

If Garrick had had no conviction that Mrs. Siddons possessed the makings of a fine actress, why should he have continued to risk the reputation of the theatre to whose welfare he had, for twenty-nine years, scrupulously subordinated every personal consideration by giving valuable parts to this novice who had been so willing to come to him in all humbleness, without contract of any kind? Why did he not relegate her from the rank occupied by Mrs. Yates, Miss Younge, and Miss Wrighten to the below-the-salt position of Mrs. Davies and Miss Sherry and Miss Hopkins, the prompter's daughter, all pretty women, but

negligible actresses, who "appeared and disappeared," as Holcroft has it in his *Theatrical Recorder*, "merely to fill up the routine"? Instead, and in spite of the unfavourable criticisms, not only did he put her on for better work, viz. to act with himself in his final performances of *Richard III*, as Lady Anne, and of Hoadly's *The Suspicious Husband*, as Mrs. Strictland to his Ranger, but, partly, no doubt, out of mischief and a pardonable desire to punish the other ladies, he handed her, in the greenroom, from her own seat to a chair next his own, he paid her perhaps exaggerated respect, he gave her a place in the boxes to see his farewell round of parts.

I like to think of the lessons Mrs. Siddons received, on her off evenings, as she watched those versatile passages of byplay, those surpassing soliloquies and 'side-speeches,' all that Diderot called Garrick's '*singerie sublime*.' Siddons was a woman, and Garrick a man, and his acting was, as far as any art can be, realism, while hers was destined to bring in, or revive, on the whole, an idealising method of representation, yet the very fact of seeing the great actor so earnest in his art was in itself an unforgettable education.

The whole sentiment of Drury Lane Theatre under Garrick must have made a tremendous impression upon the young actress, an impression bound, when leisure for the mind's reaction came, to stimulate in her every kind of professional ambition. After the rough-and-tumble, the paper wings, hoop chandelier, and superannuated scenery, the half-understood ignominy of strolling arrangements, she found herself on a stage sentinelled by two of the King's soldiers, and before a house so adroitly managed that, in Garrick's great scenes, hush men were stationed in various parts of the auditorium, to 'hist' along the thrilling silence he required.

The lessons she received from 'the sovereign of the stage' came not only by informal observation. He always took infinite trouble over training his players. Kitty Clive bore witness to this when she described him, 'with lamb-like patience,' '*endeavouring* to beat' his 'ideas into the heads of creatures who had none of their own.' In evidence, one of the 'creatures,' Edward Cape Everard, calling himself, on the title-page of his book, 'Pupil of the late David Garrick, Esq.,' states

that Garrick, reprimanding him after a rehearsal for his 'boyish blunder' of averring that he would play better on the night, said, "If you cannot give a speech, or make love to a table, chair, or marble, as well as to the finest woman in the world, you are not, nor ever will be a great actor." Garrick gave Mrs. Siddons definite suggestions towards improving her acting. He told her, as Lady Anne, not to move her arm in the stiff, exaggerated way she did, and that the management of her arms constituted one of her early difficulties we are reminded in Walpole's letter to the Countess of Upper Ossory, dated November 3rd, 1782, where he says, "Her action is proper, but with little variety; when without motion, her arms are not genteel."

Unfortunately, Mrs. Siddons did not take this correction well. She assigned to it the motive that Garrick could not bear her to shade the tip of his nose—as she put it. This amounted to saying that he would have vetoed any acting, however transcendent, on her part, if, for an instant, it diverted attention from Garrick—an idle charge. No great actor ever objected to good byplay on a subordinate's part, for the simple reason that all byplay that emphasises the scene is so much assistance to himself. Mrs. Siddons gradually deluded herself into a fixed idea—the readiest salve to wounded vanity—that her non-success, at Drury Lane, in 1776, arose from the Manager's not pushing her as he might have done had he not feared for his own predominance.

Garrick certainly told her that if he gave her the best parts, the other gentle creatures of the greenroom—to wit, Mrs. Yates and Miss Younge—would poison her. It is noticeable that Mrs. Abington, the comedy queen, was not named. She, most likely, felt, throughout, that the Siddons never could be her rival, and this may account for the fact, stated by Sheridan, that when the next Management dismissed Mrs. Siddons, Mrs. Abington alone called them fools. Garrick might truthfully have told his new 'Young Lady' that, if he permitted her to be Drury Lane's feminine mainstay on his own off nights, the receipts would fall off considerably, in view of the continued non-approbation of press and public. They did not think her worth the trouble of a hiss. 'Lamentable' was the unequivocal

word employed by the *London Magazine* for May, 1776, to sum up her performance of Lady Anne.

Temperament and genius must always vary, but it is none the less strange to contrast the slow, wavering rate at which Mrs. Siddons's art developed with the art of Garrick, which, sufficiently, at all events, for universal applause, 'reach'd perfection in' its 'first essay,' when, on October 19th, 1741, he played Richard III at Goodman's Fields. At the time Mrs. Siddons came upon the 'D. L.' scene, Garrick, then within six months of his last appearance there, was, both as an artist and socially, in his full sunset glory. Everybody who was anybody was caressing him, and fighting for places to see him play.

Remembering Mrs. Siddons's disgust at what she called 'the fulsome adulation that courted Garrick in the Theatre,' one cannot contemplate the account she gave of her uncomfortable relations with that distinguished man without a vivid suspicion that one direction in which the young lady was lacking lay in reluctance to pay compliments. If, during this winter season, she had been something less of a Cordelia, if she had heaved her heart (or words to that effect) into her mouth, and assured Garrick that his Kately was luminous, Miss Younge that her Zara was divine, and 'Moll' Yates (*æt.* forty-eight) that the whole audience took her for twenty-five, we might have traced, in the record of 1776, a lubricant we miss.

Everything Garrick said or did was a grievance to Mrs. Siddons in her overwrought condition, battling, as she thought herself, for life, in a supreme current of fortune. It is more remarkable that subsequent success never brought her its usual accompaniment of placable after-judgment. When John Taylor repeated to her Sheridan's opinion of Garrick's Richard III as 'very fine, but not terrible enough,' she exclaimed, 'Good God! what could be more terrible?' and proceeded to tell him that, while rehearsing Lady Anne to Garrick's Richard, in the morning, Garrick requested that when, at night, he led her from 'the sofa,' she would follow him step by step, because he did a great deal with his face, and wished not to turn it from the audience; 'but [she went on] such was the terrific impression his acting produced upon her, that she was much too absorbed to proceed, and obliged

By His MAJESTY'S COMPANY,  
At the Theatre Royal in Drury-Lane  
This present MONDAY, May 27, 1776,  
Will be presented a TRAGEDY, call'd

## KING RICHARD the THIRD.

King Richard by Mr. GARRICK,

(Being his First Appearance in that Character these 4 Years).

Richmond by Mr. PALMER,

Buckingham by Mr. JEFFERSON,

Tressel by Mr. DAVIES,

Lord Stanley by Mr. BRANSBY,

Norfolk by Mr. HURST,

Catesby by Mr. PACKER,

Prince Edward by Miss P. HOPKINS,

Duke of York Master PULLEY, Lord Mayor Mr. GRIFFITHS,

Ratcliffe by Mr. WRIGHT, Lieutenant by Mr. FAWCETT,

King Henry by Mr. REDDISH,

Lady Anne (First Time) Mrs. SIDDONS,

Dutcheffs of York by Mrs. JOHNSTON,

Queen by Mrs. HOPKINS.

To which will be added

## The DEVIL to PAY.

Sir John Loverule by Mr. VERNON,

Jobson by Mr. MOODY,

Lady Loverule by Mrs. JOHNSTON,

Nell by Mrs. WRIGHTEN.

*Ladies are desired to send their Servants a little after 5 to keep Places, to prevent Confusion.*

The Doors will be opened at Half after FIVE o'Clock

To begin exactly at Half after SIX o'Clock. Vivant Rex & Regina.

To-morrow, (by particular Desire) BRAGANZA, with Bon Ton, or High Life above Stair  
(Being the last Time of performing them this Season.)

And Dancing by Mr. SLINGSBY and Signora PACINI.

A PLAYBILL THAT COMBINES THE TWO GREATEST NAMES OF THE  
ENGLISH STAGE



him, therefore, to turn his back, on which he gave her such a terrible frown, that she was always disturbed when she recollected it.'

Though Garrick was constitutionally unsympathetic to failure, she could not charge him with any more unkind overt act than that he once frowned at her to remind her she was being guilty of a dereliction of obvious stage duty. Actresses on the defensive are kittle cattle, and, at this juncture, I would not (to use Mr. Shandy's phrase) give a cherrystone to choose between Clive, the 'mixture of combustibles,' Cibber, the 'greatest plague'—because the most persistent—of Garrick's ladies, Abington, 'the worst of bad women,' as, in his exasperation, he called her, and our illustrious Sarah Siddons. When it comes to a blow to their self-importance, they are all in a tale. Such is the toll the profession of acting takes from feminine good sense.

Garrick's period of unwearable, well-organised work closed on June 10th, 1776, and that was the final night (already delayed beyond the customary annual closing date) of the season for which Mr. and Mrs. Siddons had been engaged. Mrs. Siddons's last occasion of acting with Garrick was June 5th, when, for the third time, she 'supported' the character of Lady Anne to his Richard. It was a royal command night.

Whatever Garrick might have done for our heroine in an ensuing season had now to be undertaken, or let alone, by his successors in Management, Willoughby Lacy, Sheridan, Linley, and Ford. Years afterwards, when Garrick was safely dead, Sheridan used to tell the tragic queen that the outgoing Manager had made remarks adverse to her re-engagement. This, coming whence it did, was, at least, doubtful, whereas it should be noticed that a heedless public had made no sign to justify new men in retaining her.

The most crushing sentence on her acting appeared when, after she had played Julia, the girl's part, in Bate's *The Blackamoor Washed White*, the *Morning Chronicle* of Friday, February 2nd, observed of the preceding evening's cast, "All played well, except Mrs. Siddons, who endeavoured to support her character, but having no comedy in her nature, she rendered that ridiculous which the author evidently designed to be pleasant." Here was a tyro openly arraigned of 'having no



comedy in her nature,' yet Garrick had evidently thought her less apt at tragedy, or he would not have given her a greater number of comedy-young-lady parts. It is worth noticing, as showing how the timid and impressible actress fluctuated, that, in a separate paragraph of 'Theatrical Intelligence,' in the Saturday's *Morning Chronicle*, we may read, "Mrs. Siddons yesterday evening played Julia much better than on Thursday."

Mrs. Siddons and her husband confidently expected re-engagement. Garrick had promised—no doubt, in his 'hey, why now—yes, now, really, I think—Mrs. Garrick is waiting' way—to do his best to pass them on, and they themselves saw no commercial nor artistic reason for their being passed over. They were playing a summer engagement in Birmingham when the sword fell in the shape of a formal letter from the Drury Lane prompter, W. Hopkins (whose daughter John Kemble was, in 1787, to marry), to tell them that their services would not be required the following season.

Mortification made Mrs. Siddons ill. "For a year and a half I was supposed to be hastening to a decline." The castles in Spain had toppled down, and she was bound in miseries—free to make what provincial engagements she could. Her ever-smouldering rancour is eloquent in this sentence she penned in old age—"For the sake of my poor children I roused myself to shake off this despondency, and my endeavours were blest with success, in spite of the degradation I had suffered in being banished from Drury Lane as a worthless candidate for fame and fortune." That terrible sense of frustration which drives a weak soul into inactivity drove Mrs. Siddons into increased seriousness and harder work. She resolved 'to shake off this despondency.' Steadiness of pursuit is the ruling characteristic of strong natures. "The time will come when you will hear me."

### III

#### MRS. SIDDONS OF THE BATH THEATRE

FOR two years and a quarter, between the date when Drury Lane gave Mrs. Siddons her *congé* and the date when she became attached to the Bath Theatre, she and her husband were connected with various provincial stock companies. Throughout the summer and autumn of 1776, they were at Birmingham and Liverpool, under the Management of Yates and Joseph Younger.

The gallery of the new theatre in New Street, Birmingham, echoed the London verdict on the weakness of Mrs. Siddons's voice. "She motions nicely, but she can't shout out loud," declared a spokesman of the Birmingham gods. From them, and still under Younger's Management, she passed on to Manchester, where, as at Liverpool, Hamlet was one of her applauded efforts. Though she did not achieve a new Hamlet—what can a woman's Hamlet ever be but a *tour de force*?—the character appealed to her intellectual seriousness, and we may believe that, in her hands, Shakespeare's type of ironic genius suffered no further wrong than that of being arrayed in 'a shawl-like garment.' Mrs. Siddons and her husband had ceased to be the literal vagabonds of heretofore. They were engaged, for considerable periods, in stock companies of high respectability.

In Liverpool commenced the lifelong friendliness that existed between Mrs. Siddons and a woman of almost equal force of character, Elizabeth Inchbald, then still an actress. In Manchester, whither the two ladies and their husbands moved for the winter season, John Kemble, aged nineteen, became a member of the company. Boaden, in his *Memoirs of Mrs. Inchbald*, tells us that, in March 1777, the five players,

with two congenial men added, took a blameless *Wilhelm Meister* holiday, in lodgings, on Russell Moor, near Appledurcombe. In the mornings, Mrs. Siddons washed and ironed for her husband and children, singing as she worked. In the afternoons, the whole party went on the moor, and played blindman's buff and puss in the corner. In the evenings, the grown-ups sat down to cards, and, sometimes, Mrs. Siddons and Kemble obliged with duets.

A harsh, but clever, *pastiche* of Mrs. Siddons, at about this date, occurs in *Lady Bell*, by 'Sarah Tytler,' where the heroine discovers the actress seated in an inn kitchen, "and occupied, between the intervals of feeding the child, in supping heartily from a basin of bread and milk."

In Manchester, Mrs. Siddons had not been far from the circuit presided over by the enterprising Tate Wilkinson. He beckoned, and the *villeggiatura* on Russell Moor broke up early in April to allow her to enter upon a short, but triumphant, visit to York, where she carried all before her, both in tragedy and comedy, put a Miss Glassington completely in the shade, and caused a Mrs. Hudson to quarrel with the Manager to the point of leaving him. Mrs. Siddons even succeeded in melting the prejudices of a certain Mr. Cornelius Swan, York's self-constituted dramatic arbiter, and a very exacting censor indeed.

It is easy to write of any one who came in contact with that zestful anecdotist, Tate Wilkinson. Better (for biographical purposes) a month in the Ridings than a year with Younger, or any other less garrulous Manager.

Wilkinson was all over notes of admiration. Never had any previous actress so rapidly subjugated his theatre in Blake Street. Mrs. Siddons was 'a lamp not to be extinguished,' a lamp kept going by 'unquenchable flame of soul.' He recorded that his patrons, one and all, expressed their 'astonishment, that such a face, judgment, etc., could have been neglected by the London audience, and by the first actor in the world.' Tate never missed an opportunity of getting his little pocket-knife into his old benefactor, Garrick *tyrannos*. He and his wife had the visiting actress's almost constant company at their house, and, across a pinch of 'his most excellent Irish snuff' (for Tragedy's divinest daughter loved 'snuffing') Mrs. Siddons told

him—to his high satisfaction—that she liked her ‘country excursions, and the civilities she met with so well, and thought her treatment in London so cruel and unjust, she never wished to play there again.’

According to provincial usage, the Management provided the theatrical dresses, and Tate, who vaunted himself in this department as ‘the tippy,’ tried to bribe Mrs. Siddons to return to York, after the recess, as a resident, by promises of silks and fine array exceeding anything Mr. Younger’s wardrobe could offer. There was, in particular, a silver-trimmed ‘full sack,’ with a large hoop, provided for her Lady Alton (in *The English Merchant*, by George Colman the elder), for though she herself was shortly to become one of the earliest anti-hoop ladies, Tate, for his part, ‘was partial to’ whalebone on the stage, sharing Queen Charlotte’s opinion that a hoop gave consequence. Over the *confection* with the foil trimmings Mrs. Siddons ‘enthused.’ She said, in her large-eyed, innocent way, that she wished she could convey it elsewhere with her—‘it made her feel so happy.’

At York, she opened with Murphy’s *Grecian Daughter*, and, says Tate, “I had the honour of being her old father.” He especially comments on her extraordinary elegance, and on the picturesqueness of her attitudes whenever she had to fall or die on the stage. Proportioned like the Milo Venus, she possessed the indispensable requisites of elegance, a short torso and long legs, longest from knee to ankle. She was still suffering from the shock of her London dismissal, and every one at York remarked how ill and pale she looked, and wondered how she could get through her parts.

On May 17th, her month’s engagement ended with the close of the York theatrical season, and she returned to Manchester. The next notice as to her movements comes from Mrs. Inchbald’s journal, as follows:—

“I rose at three in the morning, and left Manchester in a post-chaise with Mrs. Siddons and her maid. The gentlemen rode in the stage-coach. They breakfasted at Macclesfield; after which they proceeded on their journey to Birmingham; Mr. Inchbald on horseback—Mr. Kemble was taken in to the chaise by the ladies; till very late in life he was an indifferent horseman.”

At Birmingham, in their usual style, the Siddons and Inchbald groups lodged together. Sometimes, "Mr. Inchbald painted in the apartment of Mrs. Siddons whose exertion had given her a fit of illness," and, sometimes, Kemble read English history aloud, Mrs. Inchbald making 'notes of the important facts' as he went on.

During that bleak summer when the conclusive intelligence of failure in London reached her, Mrs. Siddons had some opportunities, in Birmingham, of playing leading business with the finest actor between Garrick and Kean, John Henderson, who, by his premature death, made room for Kemble at the top of the tree. Had Henderson not died at thirty-eight, Kemble, it may be, would only be remembered to-day as the scholarly, stagy brother of a histrionic genius.

Henderson was that exceptional being, a thought-inspiring actor. Whether as Hamlet or Falstaff, he was equally masterly and subtle. Kemble described his Shylock as 'the greatest effort he ever witnessed on the stage,' and his Iago must have been one of the profoundest pieces of acting ever seen, so completely did he exhibit, side by side with Iago's villainy, Iago's almost superhuman art of concealing villainy from its victims.

It was Henderson, at the time 'the Bath Roscius' (which meant the Bath Garrick) of four golden seasons, who, discerning, in 1776, Mrs. Siddons's genius, wrote off to his Manager, John Palmer, the younger, of Bath, urging him to secure her. The outcome was an engagement, which included wife and husband, for the Orchard Street Theatre, the most distinguished theatre in England outside London. If anything could alleviate the former injuriousness of fortune, it was the fact of being engaged for the brilliant city in the West.

There is a paucity of record as to how Mrs. Siddons employed the time between her benefit at York, May 17th, 1777, and October 24th, 1778, when she commenced at Bath. Had she been unfeminine enough to preserve and docket her correspondence, as Garrick did his, information as to her whereabouts during this period, as well as a hundred other details, now missing, might enrich her biographers' pages. Garrick, by the way, went so far in methodicalness as to keep a list

of all the people who had abused him. Mrs. Siddons, whose habit it was to think of her enemies as the enemies of the Lord, was less likely than her placable predecessor to need any written list to remember them by.

During the summer of 1777, the future queen of the stage was, as playbills for June 27th—September 15th prove, in Liverpool. For part, at least, of the rest of the time intervening between York and Bath, she was playing in Manchester. In June 1778, she, her brother, and her husband were again with Younger in Liverpool. Before the theatre there opened for this latter season, the Liverpool people issued a manifesto to the effect that it was no use for Younger to bring any company to Liverpool that had not played before the King. On the opening night, Mr. Siddons was sent on, before a vociferating and bottle-throwing audience, bearing a board, 'large enough to secure his person,' inscribed with Younger's petition to be heard. The lordly assembly would, however, hear nothing. Mrs. Siddons entered next P.S., and Mrs. Kniveton O.P.—the former, for one, had fulfilled the required condition of having acted before George—but nothing could avail. Mrs. Kniveton did what Mrs. Siddons would have scorned to do, *i.e.* fainted in front of the audience, at which the wretches only laughed. They next brushed every lamp out with their hats, jumped on the stage, took back their money, and left the theatre. Kemble describes the riot in a letter to Mrs. Inchbald at Leeds.

\* The valuable patent of the Bath Theatre was, in 1777, held by as many-sided a man as the more famous earlier Bathonian, 'humble' Allen. Stirring, persevering John Palmer ran the Bath Theatre conjointly with the Bristol Theatre, and it was while moving his company (which he did three times a week) from Bath to Bristol, in the 'specials' he retained for the purpose, that the idea of mail-coaches for the postal service struck him. On August 2nd, 1784, the first English mail-coaches were driven between London and Bristol, under his auspices. In 1796, when Mayor of Bath, and five years before he first represented Bath in Parliament, Palmer set on foot, and collected, a subscription of nearly a million sterling, to aid Pitt in carrying on England's naval war.

The theatre which was to become Mrs. Siddons's first House of Fame had, when she reached it, been, for ten years, a Theatre Royal—the first theatre in England, outside London, to obtain a patent. It had, quite recently, been enlarged and ventilated, at an outlay of £1000. It is true that Mrs. Siddons was, later, to speak of its bad construction as responsible for the fears she and her friends felt, in 1782, as to whether her voice would fill Drury Lane.

Palmer had a quick eye for merit, and, once a year, made a tour round the principal country theatres, foraging for new talent, and observing what other Managers were doing. Diversely occupied as he was, he had to delegate actual managerial work upon a sub-Manager, who was 'Acting' and 'Stage' Manager in one. At Palmer's date, the prompter and the box-office keeper were more important functionaries than nowadays. Palmer's prompter, Floor, who saw Mrs. Siddons act in Liverpool, was in part—by adding his recommendations to Henderson's—instrumental in effecting her Bath engagement.

The population of 'Beautiful Bath,' including its visitors, was, in 1778, about thirty thousand. We need ask for no better image of Bath life than is given in *The Rivals*. Towards the end of October—when Mrs. Siddons began to act—the city was fast filling, for the winter season, with very genteel families. 'And more expected every day,' as Lady Miller, exactly a year later, wrote to Dr. Whalley, adding, 'Bath is become very pleasant, there is good music, good fires, good plays, cards, assemblies, etc.' By this time, King Nash had long ceased to rule Bath and hold the alms basin at the Abbey. He had done his work of abolishing coarse manners,—duelling, white aprons, and top-boots,—and, since his death in 1761, Bath had diligently taken in hand its own further refinement. There, of all places, was to be found 'a really box-audience,' the most judicious in the kingdom. Theatrically considered, Bath was a more select London. It was, also, the acknowledged antechamber to London.

"Nature and Providence may have intended the place for a resource from distemper and disquiet. Man has made it a seat of racke and dissipation." So, at Prior Park, said

Smollett, then meditating medical practice at Bath, and, indeed, the proportion of those who came for pleasure always exceeded the health-seekers. While the latter were steaming out their gout in the King's Bath, the former loitered in 'toy'-shops, absorbed vermicelli soup at Gill's, the eminent cook's, and consulted the Bath Directory. The more elegant-minded looked in, every day, some at Leake's, some at Tennant's Library (those 'evergreen trees of diabolical knowledge'), where they could converse, with congenial spirits, about pictures, taste, Shakespeare, and the winter's dramatic prospects.

Mrs. Siddons's first appearance, on October 24th, was in comedy. She played Lady Townly. She was supported by Dimond, since Henderson's departure, the Bath *premier*, Blisset, and Edwin. Of these three, John Edwin, who died of 'taking too much refreshment'—*la maladie du siècle*—at forty, is the only one whose name survives. Mrs. Siddons's second appearance was on October 27th, when she played Mrs. Candour, a part in which her 'significant looks' were praised by Mrs. Thrale, who admitted her general inferiority in comedy. Other leading ladies being in possession, Palmer, at first, only asked Mrs. Siddons, as a general thing, to act on Thursdays, the Bath Cotillon nights, when 'every thing that could move' (as Boaden rather strongly puts it) went to the Lower Rooms.

We want no surer indication of the attractiveness of Mrs. Siddons's acting than the fact that after she had been at work a few Thursdays—long enough to be seen in tragedy—the Dressed Balls began to thin, in favour of the theatre. Thomas Sheridan—a past-master—was one of the earliest enthusiasts, and she called him 'the father of my fortune and my fame.' Very shortly, she became 'this justly admired daughter of Melpomene,' and, next, 'this astonishing tragedian.' She was soon 'of the family of the sure-cards,' as Boaden says of Mrs. Inchbald as a playwright. She not only conquered the Cotillons, but, before a frivolous audience, brought tragedies into vogue. Gifted, beautiful, of unexceptionable manners and untarnished reputation, attended by a personable, sedate husband, and still in the May-morn of her youth, she was beset by invitations,



troops of friends, and other flattering evidences of success. Compared with what she had received at Drury Lane, there was certainly a substantial drop—from £5 to £3 a week—in her salary. In a country theatre, even at Bath, £5 a week would have been a 'star' salary. Here, however, she had a promising benefit to look to, which, when it came, proved beneficial to the amount of £146. Added to her regular earnings, this sum sufficed to free her from what Scott designates 'the ignoble melancholy of pecuniary embarrassment.' Mrs. Siddons of the Bath Theatre could not afford a maid to paper her curls, but was able to keep a nurse-girl to help in looking after the children, whose number the arrival of a second little daughter (Maria), born in 1779,<sup>1</sup> increased to three.

Mrs. Siddons found the circumstances of her engagement arduous from the fact that Palmer required his company to double, not their parts, but their stage, with Bristol, whence they had to return to Bath at two in the morning.

"After the rehearsal at Bath," she wrote in the autograph Memoranda she bequeathed to Campbell, "and on a Monday morning, I had to go and act at Bristol on the evening of the same day; and reaching Bath again, after a drive of twelve miles, I was obliged to represent some fatiguing part there on the Tuesday evening."

From the artistic standpoint, the four years that now supervened are deeply interesting, for, during this period, Mrs. Siddons was forming her art. These were her self-discovering years, when the gathered energies of her nature were pressing forward in one direction. Considerable success, according to its wont, only came after long study and labour. Its star, meanwhile, shone in her brain, and led her on.

Bath may fairly claim Mrs. Siddons as, dramatically, its child. The glory to which she afterwards attained was largely due to the assiduous application, varied practice, and critical following for which the Orchard Street Theatre provided the

<sup>1</sup> Campbell (i. 82) gives July 1st as the date of Maria's birth. The Registers of Bath Abbey, published (down to 1800) in the Harleian Society's Series, contain two Siddons baptisms, as follows: "1779. Feb. 24. Maria d. of William and Sarah Siddons." "1781. Apr. 26. Frances Emilia d. of William and Sarah Siddons." The latter child we must suppose to have been the daughter whom biographers mention as having died very young.



MRS. SIDDONS

THIS SKETCH BY ROMNEY HUNG ON ONE WALL FOR NEARLY A HUNDRED YEARS



opportunities. A local permanent company of trained actors, accustomed à *s'embellir*, is the true nucleus of the much-talked-of national theatre. To Mrs. Siddons Bath was, what Henderson had found it, a 'college.'

The most valuable passage that occurs in the whole of the autograph Memoranda left with Campbell registers an incident, which, though historically belonging somewhat earlier, probably to the time of the Cheltenham engagement, may well appear here, as it evidences what artless preparations Mrs. Siddons, in the beginning, had thought adequate for playing the part that afterwards became her most towering intellectual triumph, *Lady Macbeth* :—

"It was my custom to study my characters at night, when all the domestic cares and business of the day were over. On the night preceding that in which I was to appear in this part for the first time, I shut myself up as usual, when all the family were retired, and commenced my study of *Lady Macbeth*. As the character is very short, I thought I should soon accomplish it. Being then only twenty years of age, I believed that little more was necessary than to get the words into my head, for the necessity of discrimination, and the development of character, at that time of my life, had scarcely entered into my imagination. But to proceed. I went on with tolerable composure, in the silence of the night (a night I never can forget), till I came to the assassination scene, when the horrors of the scene rose to a degree that made it impossible for me to get farther. I snatched up my candle, and hurried out of the room in a paroxysm of terror. My dress was of silk, and the rustling of it, as I ascended the stairs to go to bed, seemed to my panic-struck fancy like the movement of a spectre pursuing me. At last I reached my chamber, where I found my husband fast asleep. I clapt my candlestick down upon the table, without the power of putting the candle out, and I threw myself on my bed, without daring to stay even to take off my clothes."

A more characteristic picture was never painted—first, the amazing confidence of the young actress in her power of memorising a great (though not a long) part within twenty-four hours, then her unconscious witness to her typically

histrionic temperament in her record of the emotion of the part so rapidly and completely dominating her nerves and imagination. Small wonder that out of such malleable stuff a matchless artist was shaped. The test of an artist is quick feeling in the hour of study.

The words with which the passage concludes should not be omitted, since they reveal the Mrs. Siddons of, so to speak, private clothes—that staid, businesslike, platitudinising, pike-staff matron who kept house with the spirit of fire and dew. Never was there another artist of foremost rank who showed fewer traces of what is commonly understood as art's unfailing accompaniment, The Artistic 'Temperament':—

"At peep of day I rose to resume my task; but so little did I know of my part when I appeared in it at night, that my shame and confusion cured me of procrastinating my business for the remainder of my life."

Every record of a great player's methods is interesting, especially at first-hand. The above description of how Mrs. Siddons gave herself to Lady Macbeth's part is infinitely better worth having than her barren statement about the 'labour' of acting at Bath and Bristol on alternate evenings. But nothing is so rare as to find an actor or actress writing instructively and to the point on the art of acting. It is the vice of players, when they compile their memoirs, to descant on their friends, their press notices, their tours, on anything and everything but the real thing.

As we may believe from her own testimony, Mrs. Siddons's ease in committing parts to memory was prodigious. She possessed what Lord Rosebery has called the 'priceless gift of concentration.' A fortnight of rehearsals sufficed her, at all times, even for the biggest part. Far more than on rehearsals she relied on private study. She kept her brain fertilised by incessant consideration of her parts. She was one of the wise persons who know that the secret of good work is to 'plod on, and, still'—by dint of ever deepening, ever renewed study—'keep the passion fresh.' When preparing a part, in 'the quick forge and workinghouse of thought,' she never spoke her words aloud, leaving for the rehearsals that magic awakening of her already carefully meditated conceptions. She allowed, too, for

the stimulus of theatrical surroundings, and, after her second début in London, she used to tell the elder Sheridan, on whose criticisms she, in a measure, depended, that he must first go down with her to the theatre, 'where alone she could show him exactly what she could do at night.'

One of the remarkable points about her acting in this, her early period, was that it was entirely self-derived and original. During her 1776 season, she had seen much of Mrs. Yates and Miss Younge's playing, and had had opportunities, on her off nights, to observe Mrs. Barry's methods at Covent Garden, but she seems never to have been influenced, in the slightest degree, for or against, by the way any other eminent actress had envisaged any classic part, played any scene, or uttered any speech. She seems never to have known what it was to be temporarily swept off her feet, as to her own individuality, by the individuality of an older, maturer artist.

And, however little, during the opening, the comedy, performances at Bath, her acting promised the strength and execution it was to display in 1782, it was invariably well imagined. In youth and age, on the spur of the moment or deliberately, Mrs. Siddons, whenever she spoke of her own practice of her art, spoke of it as solely indebted to her observation of nature. Her earliest remark of the kind—since it belongs to the Bath period, and occurs in a letter to her Bath friend, Dr. Whalley—should be quoted in this context:—

"I hope [she writes] with a fervency unusual upon such occasions, that you will not be disappointed in your expectations of me to-night; but sorry am I to say I have often observed, that I have performed worst when I most ardently wished to do better than ever. Strange perverseness! And this leads me to observe (as I believe I may have done before), that those who act mechanically are sure to be in some sort right, while we who trust to nature (if we do not happen to be in the humour, which, however, Heaven be praised, seldom happens) are dull as anything can be imagined, because we cannot feign."

In one sense, all acting is feigning, but Mrs. Siddons meant that what was requisite to ensure her best was her sincere, albeit transient, identification of herself with her part—the soul and

essence of great acting—which nervousness or mental pre-occupation inevitably impairs.

Her first Bath season closed on June 1st, 1779, and, before it closed, it fell to her lot, on April 29th, to read, and on May 1st to recite, Sheridan's 'Monody on Garrick.'<sup>1</sup> On September 27th, she commenced her second season with her, as yet, immature Lady Macbeth, and, during the subsequent winter, 'Master and Miss Siddons' appeared on her benefit night as her (stage) children in James Thomson's *Edward and Eleanora*. The perfection of her intelligence in pathetic tragedy had by this time securely established her position at Bath. Every touching word came bettered from her mouth; every sentiment of honour and virtue was made real by the exquisite sensibility of her utterance. Tom Davies, describing, in his *Dramatic Miscellanies* (iii. 148), what she was in 1782, notices that "her modulation of grief, in her plaintive pronunciation of the interjection, 'O!' is sweetly moving and reaches to the heart." It perhaps occurs to a latter-day person that to put so much into an 'O' would certainly require art peculiarly capable of lifting banality out of recognition. For her part, Mrs. Siddons now said openly that she wished never to leave these sympathetic Bath audiences.

It is to be noticed that William Siddons never took anything better than a minor rôle in pieces in which his wife was the heroine. When she was Jane Shore in Rowe's tragedy, he played Derby (a part of five lines); when she appeared, for one night only, as Hamlet (in Garrick and Lee's Shakespeare improved) he was Guildenstern. There is but little recorded observation as to how he supported the fourth-rate characters assigned him, but it is to be feared he was hardly worth his salary. He is stated to have been an exacting critic of other people's acting, and a good coach to his wife. He "was sometimes very cross with her when she did not act to please him," deposed Mrs. Summers, who, at Bath, played confidante to Mrs. Siddons in the tragedies. The Rev. Henry Bate, it may be remembered, described Siddons to Garrick as 'a damned rascally player, though seemingly a very civil fellow,' but, on

<sup>1</sup> "I never yet was able to read that lovely Poem without weeping most plentifully"—Mrs. Siddons to R. B. Sheridan. From an unpublished letter, in Mr. J. H. Leigh's collection, dated March 8th, 1814.

better acquaintance, retracted the condemnatory portion of his criticism sufficiently to allow that Siddons's Young Marlow was 'far from despicable.' Years later, Mrs. Siddons spoke to Whalley of her husband as a much better judge of the likeness of a MS. tragedy than herself.



#### IV

### THE BATH CIRCLE

**I**N every watering-place, there are two distinct populations, the visitors and the residents, and it is a curious fact that, at Bath, as Mrs. Siddons knew it between 1778 and 1782, the greater number of remembered names we meet in association with hers belonged to the latter section. On the other hand, among 'the flux of quality' was to be found the foremost of her admirers, in the shape of the most celebrated social queen of the late eighteenth century, Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, Reynolds's mirthful Madonna. Wherever she went, the Duchess spread the actress's fame. Indeed, after Mrs. Siddons shone forth as the Tragic Muse of England, she liked to say that she owed her translation from Bath to London to advance advertisements on the part of the Duchess. As a matter of fact, Henderson's recommendatory representations to the Drury Lane Management had counted for a good deal more.

That most likable personality, Thomas Gainsborough, had ceased to make Bath his residence about two years before Mrs. Siddons settled there. An alchemist in paint, he was a man who loved every form of art, and, on the art of acting, his remarks, in letters to his friend, Henderson, are extraordinarily penetrative. When he painted Mrs. Siddons, in what Macaulay called 'the prime of her glorious beauty,' at the age of twenty-nine, in the blue, striped gown, brown muff, and black hat, she was, once more, a Londoner, and gave the master sittings at Schomberg House. Though he found her—like the Duchess of Devonshire—hard to paint, he, at all events, succeeded in making his *chef d'œuvre* of cool colour the finest normal, or untheatrical, portrait of an actress ever painted.

"Two years before the death of Mrs. Siddons," writes Mrs. Jameson, "I remember seeing her when seated near this picture, and, looking from one to the other, it was like her still at the age of seventy."

The painter whose 'emotive' life-story afterwards became so intimately interwoven with Mrs. Siddons's personal chronicle was brought to live at Bath during the latter half of her four years' residence there. In 1780, Thomas Lawrence was only eleven, though, from his confidence and self-possession, he might have been judged to be one-and-twenty. His father, who retired from keeping the Bear Inn at Devizes when he began to see money in his brilliant son, had once been an actor, and ever after remained so addicted to the theatre that he came over from Devizes once a week to pass an evening in the Bath green-room. Certain of the fact that young Tom possessed genius though uncertain as to its direction, Thomas Lawrence *père*, at first, believed he saw in him the makings of an actor, and encouraged him to recite Shakespeare. Before long, the prodigy's even greater skill in drawing made him think differently, and, after two years on St. James's Parade, the family hired Mrs. Graham's—late Mrs. Macaulay's—Alfred House, Alfred Street, at £100 a year rent, took in a permanent 'P. G.' (Cumberland's sister, a Mrs. Alcock), and profited from Tom's precocious ability. By the time the boy was twelve, he had many sitters, among them Mrs. Siddons, of whom, during her final Bath season, he, 'Æ' 13', made—the first of his many portraits—a crayon sketch (later, engraved, and largely purchased) in her character of Euphrasia in *The Grecian Daughter*, at the moment when she stabs the tyrant. Lawrence saw the play in the Bath Theatre, and, although Mrs. Siddons sat to him afterwards, the impassioned aspect of the original portrait is due to its boy-painter's strong original impression in the playhouse.

It is disappointing that Mrs. Siddons's lodgings in Bath cannot be identified. Apparently, she and her husband were domiciled, during their last season, 'at Mr. Telling's, on Horse Street Parade.'<sup>1</sup> This, at all events, was the address given by

<sup>1</sup> In the opinion of Mr. Sydney Sydenham of Bath, this was 1 Garrard Street (now Somerset Street, Southgate Street).

her husband to the applicants for tickets for her concluding benefit.

It is pleasant to fancy Mrs. Siddons, sometimes—what with rehearsals and the children, not very often—carried in a chair to the Pump Room (her then fine health needed no waters), sometimes walking on her business about the Parades, looking, as she ever did, with her goddess-like way of moving, taller than she was, but in all places the cynosure of eyes, whether she was seen curtsying to that urbane scholar, old Mr. 'Pliny' Melmoth, or to Garrick's crony, Lord Camden, or passing the time of day with a handsome father of thirteen children, Christopher Anstey, of 5 Royal Crescent, also of Trumpington, Cambs, who, according to another famous lady,<sup>1</sup> never forgot he was the author of a celebrated poem, *The New Bath Guide*, and was, for ever after, 'shily important' (a discerning phrase!) in consequence. Mrs. Siddons would have had the sense and coolness to keep out of the way of that man of wrath, Philip Thicknesse, of St. Catherine's Hermitage, Gillray's 'Lieut.-governor Gallstone,' who was "perpetually imagining insult, and would sniff an injury from afar." She could more agreeably occupy herself in stopping to look at the classical ladies—so like herself—on the plaques and vases in Josiah Wedgwood's branch establishment in Westgate Buildings.

Foremost among the folk unknown to general history of whom she saw most during her years at Bath, Thomas Sedgwick Whalley, D.D., should be named. Dr. Whalley's father had been Master of Peterhouse, and, when the son took orders, his father's old friend, the Bishop of Ely, presented him to a fat Lincolnshire living, with the typically eighteenth-century proviso that he was not to reside on it, as the fen air was fatal to any but natives. Whalley had no comfortless scruples, but settled down at his winter house in Royal Crescent, and his country place, first, Langford Court, near Bristol, and, afterwards, when that was let, Mendip Lodge, his 'Alpine habitation,' just above it. He continued to be an absentee rector for half a century. He was *instruit* and mundane, and society was necessary to his existence. He loved everything that was the reverse of obvious.

This secular cleric and his—and his wife's—'dearest friend

<sup>1</sup> Fanny Burney.

Mrs. Siddons' were on most effusive terms. In one of her letters, she told him that she never went to bed without praying for his and Mrs. Whalley's welfare, she wore their hair in a ring, she addressed him as 'your glorious self,' 'my best, my noblest friend,' 'my most honoured.' These violent delights did not have violent ends, for when, late in the twenties of last century, her failing health forbade her writing, her daughter Cecilia continued her correspondence with Dr. Whalley, who, after all, predeceased her. When she was young, struggling, and at Bath, the Whalleys used to keep up her strength with beaten 'Tent and egg' and offerings of grapes. In her palmy days, they presented her with 'beauteous and magnificent sables' which she wore as a trimming on stage dresses.

In all Bath, there was no one more exquisite, in his very cultured way, than Whalley. So susceptible to music that a good military band set him off crying in floods, he exchanged attenuated sentimentalities, wrapped in words of Latin origin, with Anna Seward. Fanny Burney, a clearer-sighted muse, made Philistine fun of his conversation, "about his 'feelings,' about amiable motives, and about the wind, which at the Crescent, he said, in a tone of dying horror, 'blew in a manner really frightful.'" Mrs. Siddons was less awake to the absurd side of affectation. The portion of the brain which enables some persons to perceive incongruity was undeveloped in her organisation—partly, because she was a tragic actress.

Besides being a minor poet, Whalley was, it need scarcely be said, an art collector. Men of his stamp always are. It was for him that 'Barker of Bath' painted *The Woodman*. Whalley, also, adored lap-dogs, and was painted by Reynolds with his spoilt and 'bullying' Blenheim, the 'Sappho,' better known as 'Paphy,' or 'Paphy Piddy,' to whose shell-pink ears and pretty tyrannies a letter of Mrs. Siddons's, dated August 20th, 1782, rather oppressively refers.

Whalley married three times, and, each time, went where money was. His first wife suffered a long while before her death from spinal curvature, caused by a carriage accident. The second Mrs. Whalley was a Wiltshire Heathcote. Although possessed of 'a fortune of fourscore thousand pounds in her own power,' she, being sixty, was enraptured at having the

handkerchief thrown to her, and expressed to her friends her happiness in being united to a man 'whom she had always admired beyond any of her acquaintances, and who brought her a fortune equal to her own.' Within two years, the poor lady died from a cold. The widower's third dip into the lucky bag proved a failure. When nearly seventy, he espoused Lieutenant-General Charles Horneck's widow. Instead of the hoped-for fortune and good comradeship, she brought him debts and incompatibility. They 'separated by mutual disagreement,' and, while he lived in one house in Bath, she—on a handsome settlement—inhabited another, where she gave large parties. She was guilty of the further bad taste of surviving him.

A topic, at first for laughter, and, later, for indignant censure, between the Whalleys and Siddonses was that hanger-on of the literary world, Samuel Jackson Pratt, who adopted the pseudonym of 'Courtney Melmoth,' and tried to climb upwards by addressing ingratiating letters to strangers of distinction. "That *Mr. Pratt* gains character and countenance at Bath, I wonder not on his part, but I wonder on the world's," wrote, to Whalley, the Dean of Bristol, Nineveh Layard's grandfather. Locally known as 'Pratty,' the aspirant thus stigmatised had been in the Church, and on the stage, but, at the time he first swam into Mrs. Siddons's ken, was keeping the old-established library at the upper corner of Milsom Street. He was, in a hole-and-corner way, a favourite among the dowagers with whom Bath, then, as always, superabounded. "Pratt," said a caustic contemporary, "was a delightful man to women whom others had disgusted, or injured, or neglected."

Pratt had ample inclination to write, but very moderate talent. His tragedy, *The Fair Circassian*, which, produced at Drury Lane on November 27th, 1781, owed everything to Miss Farren, actually reached a nineteenth night. The gratified author followed it up by a comedy, *The School for Vanity*, in which, among other wild events, a baronet is saved from drowning by an alderman. This piece, in spite of Miss Farren's efforts, failed, and Pratt fell back on Della Cruscan poems to establish his immortality. He was, moreover, the author of

the lines that disgrace Garrick's tomb in Westminster Abbey.

For a time, he imposed on the Whalleys and Mrs. Siddons, also on the Swan of Lichfield, Anna Seward, who, when enlightenment came, was, for a Canon's daughter, almost unbecomingly irate. From Mr. and Mrs. Siddons, in their halcyon period, Pratt borrowed a considerable amount of money, and, when Mrs. Siddons asked for a fraction of it back, and—a still worse offence—told him it was her rule to read no one's MS. tragedy, he turned vicious, threatened to write a poem on her, entitled *Gratitude*, and said, among many flagrant things, that he had been the ladder on which she had mounted to fame, and was now kicking down. "What he means," commented Mrs. Siddons, "I fancy he would be puzzled to explain." In addition to his other meannesses, he had paid clandestine addresses to Miss Kemble, afterwards Mrs. Twiss, under Mrs. Siddons's roof.

Unremitting perseverance in study and practice, gradually, during the Bath years, brought Mrs. Siddons's art to perfection. From the start, as we learn from 'the reliable Genest,' she again had, occasionally, the educational advantage of acting with 'Henderson from Drury Lane,' when he paid the original discoverers of 'Mr. Courtney' a theatrical visit. On November 17th, 1778, he played Hamlet, and she, the Queen on the 19th, she was Portia to his Shylock. He extolled her to young Sheridan, and she spoke of him, in her measured way, as 'a fine actor, with no great personal advantages indeed, but the soul of intelligence.' As early as July 12th, 1780, as is attested by the postscript of a letter from Sheridan to Joseph Cradock, the Drury Lane Management was hoping to absorb Mrs. Siddons. The postscript runs, "I am at present endeavouring to engage Mrs. Siddons, of the Bath Theatre, which, if I effect, I will inform you." This letter is the sole evidence I have come upon that Sheridan contemplated the engagement of Mrs. Siddons two years before he brought it off.

During the season of 1780-81, Mrs. Siddons introduced her sister Frances to the public, as an actress. By her own benefit that year 'Mr. Siddons' (there was, then, no Married Women's Property Act!) realised £124. During

1781-82, came the definitive summons to London. "It may be imagined that this was to me a triumphant moment," said Mrs. Siddons.

Bath audiences did not part from her willingly, and a newspaper paragraph appeared, stating that Mr. Palmer was 'in expectation of prevailing upon Mr. Sheridan to spare her a year or more to us.' With the profits she had brought him, Palmer, in 1781, made a good coachway up to his theatre, with a stand capable of accommodating over fifty equipages. Quite recently, no doubt by reason of her popularity, he had advanced the price of the boxes by a shilling. Yet he did not offer her in time the moderate rise that would—Boaden states—have retained her in a place where she was happy. One wonders whether Lord North's tax on theatres, then impending, had anything to do with his hesitancy. "What a pity this man did not sooner become sensible to Mrs. Siddons's value and his own interest!" wrote, in a letter of the end of March, a Bath lady, related to the Whalleys, Miss Penelope Sophia Weston, soon afterwards the wife of William Pennington, the American Loyalist, later, M.C. at 'the Bristol Hot Wells,' and Clifton's oddest inhabitant.

This season, the prospering actress took two benefits at Bath, and a third at Bristol, £146, £145, 18s., and £106, 13s. At all three, the pit was 'laid into' boxes, and the front of the gallery partitioned off, for 'the gentlemen of the pit.' A book was, moreover, placed in the box-office, "for those ladies and gentlemen to subscribe, who should wish to pay a compliment . . . and might be absent from Bath at the time of the benefit." This brought in twenty additional guineas at the first benefit. On the playbills of the second and third, Mrs. Siddons announced that she would produce, at the end of the evening, three reasons for her leaving Bath. This sounded mysterious. *The Distressed Mother*, Ambrose Philips's version of Racine's *Andromaque*, was the play chosen. Dr. Whalley alone was in the secret. After the curtain rose for the epilogue, Mrs. Siddons led forward Harry, Sally, and Maria Siddons, the Three Reasons, and very lovely and like Reynolds's 'Charity' in the New College window, she, no doubt, looked, with her beautiful children clinging to the long folds of her gown.

The idea of the Three Reasons was developed at length in a rhymed address, spoken and composed by this all-competent matron:—

“ . . . These are the moles that heave me from your side,  
Where I was rooted—where I could have dy’d.”

We may imagine how the theatre rang with applause, and how every *pater familias* present wiped his eyes. All through her career, Mrs. Siddons displayed an instinct for personal, and not merely stage, publicity.



## CONQUEST OF LONDON

THE year that shuddered at the disappearance of the *Royal George* off 'the Fair Island,' in a waveless summer sea, was the year that witnessed the long-deferred emergence of England's greatest actress. In 1782, she was 'turned of' twenty-seven.

Early in 1783, Dr. Russell, historian of Europe, published, under his initials, W. R., a poem concerning her, entitled *The Tragic Muse*, in which he stated that—

"This bright Jewel from the Mine to bring,  
Delightful task! was left for generous King,"

but the assertion was only a figure of speech. It was not till the season that saw Mrs. Siddons's Restoration that Sheridan consigned Drury Lane's actual management to King, and then he did so without giving that incomparable speaker of prologues an iota of authority to engage players, or accept plays. Moved by his father, by Henderson, and by Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, it was Sheridan himself who had effected the engagement of Mrs. Siddons.

In D. L. playbills for September 20th and 21st, is to be found, among 'notes,' at the foot, "Mrs. Siddons (From the Theatre Royal, Bath) will shortly make her appearance at this Theatre in a capital Character in Tragedy." On the playbill for September 28th, and again for October 7th, the part she was to play was specified.

On Thursday, October 10th, 1782, she reappeared—and sealed her triumph. Her probative part was Isabella, in Garrick's version of the tragedy of that name Thomas Southerne wrote, in 1694.

Perhaps none but actors can realise the tremors and earnest

prayers which were the prelude to October 10th. She was in for her final, before the great examining board of London playgoers, and there was much to intimidate, yet more to stimulate, her in the thought. There was the stinging remembrance that, six years before, she had failed to satisfy these, or similar, examiners, but, this time, she knew that her genius would not be veiled and hampered by immaturity. Nothing was left of that trembling Portia who was judged to be 'uncertain whereabouts to fix either her eyes or her feet.'

At the rehearsals—she had only two—she created the right sensation. At the first, she says, "The countenances, no less than tears and flattering encouragements of my companions, emboldened me more and more;" at the second, "Mr. King was loud in his applauses." Her eight-year-old son, Harry, rehearsing the part of Isabella's child with her, unconsciously helped forward the preliminary thrill, by breaking into sobs, as he watched the dying scene, because he thought that, this time, his mother was not acting, but really suffering, and really about to leave him.<sup>1</sup>

When, on October 8th, Mrs. Siddons reached home after her second rehearsal, she was seized, to her consternation, with nervous hoarseness. Her own words, again from her fragments of autobiography, have more than once been reprinted, but no paraphrase could represent the experience of her next forty-eight hours with anything approaching their tensivity.

"I went to bed in a state of dreadful suspense. Awaking the next morning, however, though out of restless, unrefreshing sleep, I found, upon speaking to my husband, that my voice was very much clearer. This, of course, was a great comfort to me; and moreover, the sun, which had been completely obscured for many days, shone brightly through my curtains. I hailed it, though tearfully, yet thankfully, as a happy omen; and even now I am not ashamed of *this* (as it may, perhaps, be called) childish superstition. On the morning of the 10th my voice was, most happily, perfectly restored; and again '*the blessed sun shone brightly on me.*'"

Tom Welsh, the singing-master, father-in-law of Piatti,

<sup>1</sup> The *Morning Post*, October 10th, 1782.

told John Payne Collier, in 1832, at the Garrick Club, that he had had it from Mrs. Siddons's own lips that she so completely overslept herself, after her previous fatigue, and a sleepless, anxious night, that, far from starting in time for a final rehearsal fixed for 10 a.m., she lay on, unconscious—her family having decided not to wake her—till one o'clock.

Her autobiographical Memoranda take up the story:—

"On this eventful day my father arrived to comfort me, and to be a witness of my trial. He accompanied me to my dressing-room at the theatre. There he left me; and I, in one of what I call my desperate tranquillities, which usually impress me under terrific circumstances, there completed my dress, to the astonishment of my attendants, without uttering one word, though often sighing most profoundly."

Though she told Lawrence that, up to her highest maturity, she was shaken with nervousness before going on in a great part, yet, true to her self-contained, reasonable nature, even the nervousness common to all actors and actresses took, with her, the form of 'desperate tranquillities.' But, with her, nervousness was done with as soon as the curtain rose. At that moment, impersonation—what Salvini called transmigration—took place, and, by a derivative, equally instantaneous, process, the audience turned into the proverbial rows of cabbages.

"At length [continues her narrative of October 10th] I was called to my fiery trial. The awful consciousness that one is the sole object of attention to that immense space, lined, as it were, with human intellect from top to bottom and all around, may, perhaps, be imagined, but can never be described, and can never be forgotten."

Reading *Isabella*; or *The Fatal Marriage* now, and comparing it with other pieces in Mrs. Siddons's early repertory, one cannot but rejoice that it actually is, like the child's drama described by a schoolfellow, 'a little in the style of Shakespeare.' A simplicity, as of an age more golden than its own, resides in some of the lines spoken by the heroine. The story is that of a passionately devoted wife, who, believing herself a widow, under stress of poverty remarries, for her child's sake, and finds next day that her first husband is living. The situation caused by his entrance is followed, on her part, by 'phrenzy's wild

distracted glare' and a dagger used, with a laugh, against herself.

Mrs. Siddons would have chosen the more ornate part of Euphrasia, in *The Grecian Daughter*, but 'Mr. Sheridan, senior,' knew that her strength lay in pathos, and persuaded her into undertaking the character that would give her most opportunity.

It is disconcerting to learn that, in obedience to our great-grandfathers' crude views as to value for money, immediately after sympathising with the anguish of Isabella, people were supposed to be equally ready to participate in the humours of the farce, which was William Whitehead's *A Trip to Scotland*. In this direction, a change was at hand. By 1784, only two years after Mrs. Siddons's uprisal, Tom Davies entered in his *Dramatic Miscellanies*, "The farces, which used to raise mirth in an audience after a tragedy, now fail of that effect from Mrs. Siddons's having so absolutely depressed the spirits of the audience."

The new actress scored a magnificent success in *Isabella* acting it eight times in the first three weeks, and sixteen times more between November and the June of 1783. It even remained her favourite non-Shakespearean part with audiences. It was one of those she most fully realised, for, with a few exceptions, the characters in which she excelled were characters in which the motherly side of feminine emotion predominated. To her, the part of Juliet was not *simpatica*. Similarly, as Boaden acutely observes, her Jane Shore was convincing as to everything save as to the fact that Jane Shore had been an adulteress.<sup>1</sup> Her air of command, alone, visually banished the notion of frailty, and in her own nature she had nothing of the *grande amoureuse*.

The effect the restored *débutante* produced on her audience was prodigious, and full-handed thunder greeted this apparition of sensibility and power. To ancient Macklin, seated in the front boxes, a mild gentleman remarked, "I think the new actress promises well." "I think she performs well," snarled the veteran. With every act, enthusiasm grew greater. At the

<sup>1</sup> A similar remark was made, later, by Fanny Kemble concerning Mrs. Siddons's Mrs. Haller.

close of the tragedy, as Boaden quaintly puts it (and we must suppose he was recording an observed fact), "literally the greater part of the spectators were too ill to use their hands in her applause." When she got home, everything had to be recounted to Mr. Siddons, who had been too agitated to venture to Drury Lane.

Her account of how she finished this victorious evening is a gem of narrative. All that was finest and most endearing in her character breathes through its simple sentences:—

"I reached my own quiet fireside, on retiring from the scene of reiterated shouts and plaudits. I was half dead; and my joy and thankfulness were of too solemn and overpowering a nature to admit of words, or even tears. My father, my husband, and myself sat down to a frugal neat supper in a silence uninterrupted except by exclamations of gladness from Mr. Siddons. My father enjoyed his refreshments, but occasionally stopped short, and, laying down his knife and fork, lifting up his venerable face, and throwing back his silver hair, gave way to tears of happiness. We soon parted for the night; and I, worn out with continually broken rest and laborious exertion, after an hour's retrospection, (who can conceive the intenseness of that reverie?)<sup>1</sup> fell into a sweet and profound sleep, which lasted to the middle of the next day. I rose alert in mind and body."

Out of the circle of Bath well-wishers Mrs. Siddons chose Whalley to whom to unbosom her joy at the ringing success of her great assault. "I never in my life heard such peals of applause," she wrote to him, next day. "I thought they would not have suffered Mr. Packer to end the play."

In conversation, late in her life, with C. R. Leslie's friend, Newton, Mrs. Siddons said, emphatically, "*I was an honest actress*, and at all times in all things endeavoured to do my best." She, in part, owed her capacity for sustained hard work to her fine physique. Hard work and plenty of stimulus were the régime that best suited her. At Bath, when she was the mother of young children, she would study till three in the morning, after getting back from Bristol at midnight. Without literally accepting Sir Joshua Reynolds's dictum that those determined

<sup>1</sup> *Query*. Was this reflection Mrs. Siddons's, or Campbell's interpolation?

to excel must know no hours of dissipation—for a proportion of every theatrical *renommée* is due to the judicious cultivation of patrons during hours of so-called dissipation—she consistently put work before family, society, and leisure. Except that Macready locked himself into his theatre, and practised there on Sundays, ‘after morning service,’—a proceeding Mrs. Siddons would have deprecated,—not even Macready, laborious though he was, outdid her in application. “She certainly did not spare herself.—Neither the great nor the vulgar can say that Mrs. Siddons is not in *downright earnest*,” remarks Davies, in his *Dramatic Miscellanies*.

It was happy for her that she was blessed with a tenacious verbal memory, for the quickly changing bills of her time demanded powerful memory efforts. Henderson might well write, as he did, in 1773, to his Bath employer, Palmer, “Let me assure you, upon the credit of experience, that to keep over fifty characters of great magnitude, importance and variety, distinct and strong upon the mind and memory, is no trifling business.” No member of the Kemble family was ever known to appeal to the prompter.

Mrs. Siddons’s genius for impersonation was so potent that, had she been, as Jules Janin found Rachel, ‘*petite, assez laide ; une poitrine étroite, l’air vulgaire et la parole triviale*,’ she would still have hypnotised audiences into believing that she looked whatever each heroine was supposed to be looking. But, for her further advantage, her physical equipment was so consummate that no victory of mind over matter was needed. She was not much above the middle height, but, like many other beautiful women, seemed taller than she was. In frame, somewhat large of bone, her grandeur of mien and the amplitude of her gestures added to the impression, inseparable from one’s image of her, of a goddess-like tallness. Mrs. Piozzi said that the Earl of Errol, in his robes at George III’s coronation, and Mrs. Siddons, as Murphy’s Euphrasia, were the noblest specimens of the human race she ever saw.

Mrs. Siddons naturally found it more stimulating to play in a large theatre, after the comparatively narrow Orchard Street stage. She was the actress of all others fitted to a wide proscaenium. At later dates, it was remarked that on a small

provincial stage, her manner, winning its triumphs by broad effects, her grandiose demeanour, and her sweeping movements made her seem out of the picture. George Bartley, who played Edward IV to her Margaret of Anjou, in *The Earl of Warwick*, described her, to Campbell, as looking a 'giantess,' when she entered, at the back of the stage, through an 'extensive archway,' which she 'really seemed to fill.'

Her beauty was of a type that wore well. When she was a girl, a friend of her father's deplored two facts in her appearance—that she was too thin, and that she was all eyes. To the first defect she lived to look back with wistful remembrance; the second, also, ceased, as the contour of her face grew fuller and rounder. To Whalley, she wrote of herself, after the advent, at the end of 1785, of her younger son, George, as not having been 'in face these last four months,' and Charles Kemble told William Bodham Donne, the Examiner of Plays, that, 'like all the Kembles,' she became 'very emaciated, not to say scraggy,' while babies were following one another in quick succession.

If the glory of her person will live for ever in the two celebrated portraits, painted during the same year, the enskyed Reynolds, and the superb, impassive Gainsborough (which I once heard a visitor to the National Gallery designate 'Mrs. Siddons as the Duchess of Devonshire'), the soft loveliness of her face and bust is more realisable from two frost-fine chalk drawings by Lawrence, one lithographed by Lane, the other engraved by Nicholls, which have, comparatively recently, been reproduced in Mr. Knapp's *An Artist's Love Story*. From these intimate portraits by the man over whom the Kemble type exercised nothing less than a spell, we see how much her beauty consisted in the setting of her full-orbed eyes, the upward curl of her dark and silky lashes, the shape of her chin and forehead, the modelling of her deep bosom and nobly muscular shoulder—for hers was a robust, not a fragile, charm.

She possessed 'the Kemble Eye' in its highest perfection. Samuel Russell, an old actor, told Curling that those only who were on the stage with her, playing their parts, could have any idea of the power of her eye. "It made the person on whom it

was levelled, almost blink and drop their own eyes." All observers concur that, when she was acting, her eyes could be seen to sparkle or glare at an incredible distance. "The effect of her eyes," wrote the Rev. E. Mangin (author of *Piozziana*), "was greatly assisted by a power she had of moving her eye-✓brows, and the muscles of her forehead," and Genest says that, at certain movements, on the stage, she had a look with her eyes hardly possible to describe—"she seemed in a manner to turn them in her head." These wonderful eyes were usually described as black—"of the deepest black," said James Beattie, but the great portrait-painters knew better. To them, they were sepia-brown; in repose, like heavy velvet.

Her face was 'seldom tinged with any colour, even in the whirlwind of passion,' remarks John Wilson, and we gather from the comment that she used little rouge when acting. As regards her nose, Walpole did not find either it or her chin according to the Greek standard, "beyond which both advance a good deal," and every one remembers Gainsborough's baffled ejaculation, as he threw down his brush, "Damn it, Madam, there is no end to your nose!" In every portrait alike, we find 'the nose,' straight, and, for Aphrodite, a thought too long, but betokening artistic capacity and decision of character. It was the nose that made her profile what the *Morning Chronicle* of October 11th, 1782, termed it, 'grand, elegant and striking.' We need only glance at the generalised portraits of John Kemble which Lawrence exhibited, under 'character' names, to know any one of them by Kemble's eagle beak. The Nose ran—if the expression may be permitted—through the family.

A study of many portraits of Mrs. Siddons brings one to the conclusion that her face, able and ready for expression, was not too expressive in repose. It was plastic—the player's ideal face.

On her multitudinous portraits a volume might be written. Besides the great Gainsborough,<sup>1</sup> the great Reynolds, and the favourite Lawrence, all reproduced in this volume, there is the Warwick Castle full-length (in the Catalogue of the Guelph Exhibition, 1891, ascribed to Reynolds) with the dagger and mask, and Lord Llangattock's portrait of her, attributed to Gains-

<sup>1</sup> Sold to the National Gallery, in 1862, by Major Mair, husband of the sitter's granddaughter.



borough, in Cavalier costume, while, in a 'Catalogue of Lawrence's Exhibited and Engraved Works,' appended to Lord Ronald Gower's *Sir Thomas Lawrence*, Mr. Algernon Graves names no fewer than fourteen several portraits of her. In 1783, Romney made the sketch<sup>1</sup> that faces p. 38, the finished replica of which the *Morning Chronicle*, May 8th, 1786, called his "incomparable head of Mrs. Siddons, which Raphael would be glad of, penetrated by something superior even to Taste!"

After the work of the *dii majores*, the half-length by J. Downman, A.R.A., in the beribboned cap and scalloped fichu, stands, perhaps, first. It is well known from P. W. Tomkins's engraving, reproductions of which were included in the *Magazine of Art*, 1887 ('Some Portraits of Sarah Siddons'); in the reprint, 1896, of Boaden; in *The Two Duchesses*, 1898—mistakenly, there, as Elizabeth, Duchess of Devonshire; and in Lord Howard de Walden's edition of *The Reminiscences of Henry Angelo*, 1904. On the back of the painting is inscribed, in Downman's handwriting, these words, kindly communicated to me by the present owner: "Mrs. Siddons. 1787. Original. the great tragic Actress. I drew this for the Duke of Richmond, but he preferred the Duplicate. Off the Stage I thought her face more inclined to the comic." Comparison of this portrait with the Romney sketch induces conviction that both were faithful likenesses. Sir William Beechey's interesting figure, seated, in white, with white turban, painted about 1798, an ever-attractive subject with copyists in the National Portrait Gallery, comes next among private life portraits.

However positive we may feel that Mrs. Siddons was a 'trumpet set for Shakespeare's lips to blow,' the overwhelming majority of her stage portraits depict her at the sensational moments of non-Shakespearean drama. Harlow not only painted the famous Katharine portrait, but made a pencil drawing of her, dated 'December 1813,' as Lady Macbeth (only a few reproductions of which were printed), but, besides this latter, there is no record that can be called artistic of her highest dramatic achievement.

Among five portraits (five, at least) of Mrs. Siddons,

<sup>1</sup> Sold, in 1906, at Christie's, 'the property of a gentleman,' for 2500 guineas.

by William Hamilton, of the four in character, as Isabella, Euphrasia, Jane Shore, and Lady Randolph, the first, a large canvas now in Lord Hotham's collection, is the most noteworthy. Even in Caldwell's print, it fascinates—the womanhood is so heroic, the affliction so gorgeous—and this in spite of Genest's criticism that "as she is simply standing with the child in her hand," no "particular idea of her manner" is conveyed. *A propos*, the following story is told of one of Mrs. Siddons's sittings, in 1782, to the Scotch Academician, at 63 Dean Street. Hamilton and his wife, accompanying her, on leaving, to the door, commented to her on her resemblance to a sculptured Ariadne on the staircase. She clasped her hands in ecstasy. "Yes, it is very"—she began, and was adding "like," when a wave of modesty turned the word into "beautiful—so very beautiful, I fear you must be flattering me." With this, she sat on the stairs, gazing at the marble, and repeating, "so beautiful, you must be flattering me."

In addition to the early Lawrence Euphrasia, and Hamilton's, J. K. Sherwin (engraving as well as painting) and H. Repton portrayed her in that character. Stothard drew her as Calista, Shireff painted her both alone and with Kemble. In the Garrick Club hangs an ultra-theatric full-length by Westall, the gift of Sir Squire Bancroft. The Guelph Exhibition included, among many portraits, miniatures by Cosway, Horace Hone, R.A., Samuel Shelley, G. Chinnery, R.H.A., and William Hamilton, and a water-colour of her with her brothers by Sir W. T. Newton. Romney introduced her, as 'Tragedy,' among the red shadows of *The Infant Shakspeare instructed by the Passions*, now at Stratford: in another *genre* work, Lawrence's *Satan*, she appears, at Satan's feet. W. Mansell had her as 'Queen Rant' in 'The Caricaturers Stock in Trade 1786'; Gillray's 'bludgeon-pencil' dealt with her in 'Blowing up the Pic Nic's,' and other prints; Rowlandson expressed his notion of her, 'being instructed by her father.' Where she toured, there she sat to some one, and, for wealthy admirers, like Mrs. Fitzhugh and Lord Hardwicke, she sat to their favoured painters. It would be hard to find a contemporary artist who never depicted Mrs. Siddons. Lady Templetown cut her in paper, as Jane Shore, for publication. Flaxman, designing chessmen, made the queens

from her. Mr. Fitzgerald speaks of an Irish collection of water-colour drawings, by Miss Sackville Hamilton, of her *poses* and costumes.

Where painters led, engravers followed. Bartolozzi, J. R. Smith, Clint, Heath, Sherwin, Say, Caroline Watson, and a tribe of others disseminated over Great Britain presentments of Mrs. Siddons, 'antique-limbed and stern,' with the face of a Fate on a gem. 'Minstrel' Beattie, being a Scot, thought her the most beautiful woman of her time 'excepting the Duchess of Gordon,' but Stothard thought excepting Mrs. Fitzherbert. Stothard said that commanding as Mrs. Siddons always was, in her youth, as he found when painting her, the exceeding delicacy of her beauty seemed far greater off the stage. On some one observing that she would be the finest possible subject, not for a picture, but a statue, and that a bust was not enough to 'convey a full idea of her surpassing majesty,' he cordially assented, and mentioned the remark to Flaxman.

A notice of portraits should not omit mention of memorial statues. Of Thomas Campbell's colossal figure (1846)—substituted for his intended mural *alto-relievo*, now in the National Portrait Gallery—in Westminster Abbey, we read only too much in *Macready's Reminiscences*. On Macready the trouble and expense of its erection was allowed, by a distinguished and aristocratic committee, almost entirely to fall. L. Chavalliaud's statue (1897) on Paddington Green, minikin in scale—Mrs. Siddons seen through the wrong end of an opera-glass—has the distinction of being the only open-air statue of an actress in England.

When we think of Mrs. Siddons's impressiveness, sureness, strength, and fire, we dwell on characteristics other first-rate women-actors have abundantly possessed, but the quality all her own, the essence of her stage personality, was her innate majesty, and, here, no other actress, however otherwise gifted, has yet been her peer. "... were a wild Indian to ask me, What was like a queen? I would have bade him look at Mrs. Siddons"—Tate Wilkinson's statement is convincing.

Mrs. Siddons, in her Memoranda, gives this ingenuous explanation of her composure when she was first introduced at Buckingham House:—



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"I afterwards learnt from one of the ladies who was present at the time that her Majesty had expressed herself surprised to find me so collected in so new a position, and that I had conducted myself as if I had been used to a court. At any rate, I had frequently personated queens."

As befitted a queen of tears, melancholy tenderness was, by all accounts, the normal characteristic of Mrs. Siddons's voice, and her prevailing stage expression was sad. A Rector of St. Stephen's, Wallbrook, thus describes the impression she made on him:—

"... I never saw so mournful a countenance combined with so much beauty. Her voice, though grand, was melancholy—her air, though superb, was melancholy; her very smile was melancholy."<sup>1</sup>

Contemporary notices of how Mrs. Siddons dressed her parts are few, partly, no doubt, because Tragedy takes less thought for clothes than Comedy. Abington's fertile genius for costume would have only belittled a Siddons. A probability emerges that audiences were not certain what 'the Tragic Music' had on, beyond being convinced that she was

'clad in the usual weeds  
Of high habitual state,'

as Joanna Baillie has it, in *De Montfort*, describing the heroine (Mrs. Siddons). We know that the effect of Lady Macbeth's sleep-walking dress was that of a soft, muffling whiteness, and that it was designed by Sir Joshua. In the first two acts of *Macbeth*, Mrs. Siddons appeared in a costume copied from a bridal suit of Mary, Queen of Scots, so, if the history was anachronistic, the geography was unimpeachable. Seeing that the antiquarian Kemble dressed all Shakespeare's historical plays (as a step towards realism) in Charles I costumes, it was he, most probably, who suggested to his sister the Mary Stuart dress. Mrs. Siddons, by the way, was the first heroine who dissociated madness from white satin.

It was upon her first appearance as Belvidera at Drury Lane that Boaden made the following antediluvian comment: "There was no Venetian costume affected, for in modern times it is not

<sup>1</sup> *Marston; or the Soldier and Statesman*. By the Rev. George Croly, LL.D., i. 50, 51. 1846.

worth the inquiry for stage purposes how the different parts of Europe dressed." In our days of 'an exact knowledge of reality,' every one may have his laugh at Macbeth in a tie wig, and the Grecian daughter in hoops. Should we not, rather, bring our archæological minds to bear on the wider æsthetic considerations urged by Deschamps in that best poem on a picture ever written before Rossetti's sonnets, a poem that may be roughly Englished thus:—

When Veronese limned each sunburnt guest  
At Cana's feast, he made no curious quest  
In Galilee if silver threads or gold  
Ran through the festal robe's embroidered fold,  
Nor how were shaped those instruments divine  
Which sang when God turned water into wine.  
Yet the Venetian with his virile hand  
Made living men of that musician band,  
And, though for this or that the critics blame,  
For me, I love the picture : 'tis the same  
Whether they carry hautboy, viol, or lyre,  
Their hands are flesh. I am silent. I admire.

George III, in his paternal way, warned Mrs. Siddons against using white paint on her neck, as dangerous to health. When Reynolds and Gainsborough painted her in 1784, she was still under the dominion of what Elizabeth Inchbald uncompromisingly called 'the larded meal.' The effect of the mounted head was to make the face very small. At the same time, the natural shape of the head was lost, winged out, as it was, by 'certain side-boxes of curls.' It described, instead, an equilateral triangle of which the base was uppermost. The head-building process, from the first papillotes to the last puff of the powder machine, must have been painfully tedious, and busy Mrs. Siddons gained many hours a week when, in November 1795, she broke through the tyranny of powder, and, like her strong-minded friend, Mrs. Inchbald, who was among the first innovators, tried the effect<sup>1</sup> of natural hair on the stage.

In words only surpassed by Boaden's statement that Henderson's Othello "agonised himself and everybody fortunate

<sup>1</sup> Campbell states that, during her second season (1783-84), Mrs. Siddons went unpowdered, and with hair already *à la grecque*, and that Reynolds, thereupon, 'rapturously praised the round apple form which she had given to her head.' Judging from portraits, Campbell antedated this speech. Reynolds did not die till 1792.

enough to hear him," the *Morning Chronicle*, describing Mrs. Siddons's first triumphal night in London, observed she "wore her sorrows with so much persuasive sincerity" that she "wrung the heart, and gratified the judgment." Such criticisms may well bring us up anew against the *naïf* wonder as to why people should consider it a pastime to look on at the re-presentation of 'sorrows and agonies.'

In view of the tears and screams, fainting-fits and convulsions, that Mrs. Siddons's acting called forth, one must conclude that the pleasure of seeing her act was a pleasure that was all but pain. Miss Williams Wynn attests this, where, describing the effect Mrs. Siddons's acting had upon her, she calls it a "thrill which more exactly answers the idea of *pleasing pain* than anything I ever felt, and I can hardly attach any other meaning to the words." Henry Angelo records, in his 'Reminiscences,' how, one night, when he, with his family, was in Mrs. Lacy's box to see Mrs. Siddons play *Isabella*, a young lady, who had been at the rehearsal in the morning, "determined to be beforehand to have a good cry, and not all our laughing and persuasion could prevent her shedding tears. The idea of what she must expect from her affecting acting, was enough to produce weeping." Genest states that the excruciating pathos of Mrs. Siddons's *Cleone*, performed on November 22nd, 1786, so affected 'the Ladies' that, on the 24th, the evening announced for a repetition of Dodsley's 'slaughter-house' tragedy, the boxes were half deserted. The play, consequently, was, thenceforth, laid aside, whereby "some admirers, who on the supposition that she would play the character frequently, had not hurried about seeing her, were greatly disappointed."

It was, clearly, Mrs. Siddons who brought in the fashion for the house to shriek whenever the heroine shrieked. The fainting ladies and the ostentatious pocket-handkerchiefs also dated from Mrs. Siddons's first season. These hysterical follies 'caught on,' and, very soon, people were 'swooning' on the slightest theatrical provocation. It would be interesting to know in which decade the fainting fashion declined. Fanny Kemble, in her day, mentions having twice seen people seized with epilepsy at the funeral procession in *Romeo and Juliet*. Such physical paroxysms produced in, and willingly accepted



by, audiences as part of the enjoyment, form an extraordinary ✓ phenomenon in the history of theatres. Regarding the reality of these violent responses of the nervous system to violent stimulus, there can, in many instances, be no question, and it was not only in the case of innocent members of the public, Gautier's '*public essentiellement sérieux qui croit à ce qu'il voit*,' that they were made, as witness the anecdote of Holman and Macready's father, both hardened actors, sitting in the Drury Lane pit while Mrs. Siddons played in *The Grecian Daughter*. Any one who reads *The Grecian Daughter* to-day will scarce forbear to yawn, yet, after the death-scene, Holman turned to his companion, and said, "Macready, do I look as pale as you?" Hazlitt, when summarising Mrs. Siddons's artistic career, recorded, "We have, many years ago, wept outright during the whole time of her playing Isabella." Crabb Robinson was another cool enough hand who yet became so hysterical when, in 1797, Mrs. Siddons was playing Agnes, in Lillo's *Fatal Curiosity*, that, he tells us, he was all but turned out, in the idea that he was laughing by intention.

To be so excited, playgoers must be anything but 'barren spectators,' and there can be little doubt that the audiences of those days were keener than modern audiences. They produced better critics of acting, for Hazlitt, Lamb, and Leigh Hunt left no successors equally acute and analytic concerning the acting, in contradistinction to the play.<sup>1</sup> The whole house was interested in 'readings' and 'business.' Thanks to short runs, and to the consequent frequent repetition of Shakespearean and other masterpieces, every head in the auditorium could well be, in Mr. Max Beerbohm's phrase, a heavy casket of reminiscence.

As regarded the adequacy of the voice, found wanting by Mrs. Siddons's critics of 1775-76, she and her friends had, before the crucial October 10th, many qualms, and, indeed, during her first brilliant winter, though none could censure her articulation, for she took care of every consonant, as her mother had taught her, a few adverse opinions lingered. In all probability, before she found the pitch of the house, sheer anxiety made her strain

<sup>1</sup> *Per contra*, it must be remembered that Leigh Hunt's and Hazlitt's 'Theatrical Examiners' had not to go to press two hours after the fall of the curtain.

her voice, since the *Morning Post* said that, in her purple patches, she raised it harshly and inharmoniously.

Her propriety of utterance and correct emphasis were the points specially commended by the King, which, at the end of her opening season, procured her, by Queen Charlotte's express command, the post of Reading Preceptress to the Princesses—'a position,' wrote Campbell—in the draft of his *Life of Mrs. Siddons*—'all *HONOUR*, but no *SALARY*, and, therefore, I believe, little in request.'<sup>1</sup> Certainly, Mrs. Siddons's appointment was honorary, but the Queen, on one occasion, gave her 'a magnificent gold chain, with a cross of many-coloured jewels,'—Mrs. Siddons called it her 'badge of honour,'—and, on another, presented her with a nomination to the Charterhouse for her elder son. The actress always had the honour of driving to and from Buckingham House in a royal carriage.

We learn more of Mrs. Siddons's non-theatrical history, during 1782-83, from the letters to Whalley, preserved in his 'Memoirs,' than from any other source. 'Pratty'—or Benignus, as the Bath set sometimes called Pratt—met with a considerable share of comment. He began well, by writing Mrs. Siddons an epilogue, which was, later, vastly applauded, though, on the first night, it had to be dropped out of the programme, on account of her 'excessive fatigue of mind and body'—and by this fact alone we may judge how she had gathered up all her force for one supreme encounter. Her letter, unfortunately as far as Pratt was concerned, went on, "Never, never, let me forget his goodness to me." What 'Benignus' must have considered a golden opportunity for repaying his goodness arrived only too soon, but Mrs. Siddons did no more than profess herself sadly grieved over the fact that, after the predestinate failure of Thomas Hull, the actor's, anonymously produced prose tragedy, *The Fatal Interview*, the Management "would not let her" risk her reputation in Pratt's comedy, *The School for Vanity*.

Though Walpole heard that 'the Siddons' was declining great dinners on the plea of her perpetual business and family responsibilities, already the world was making its claims felt.

<sup>1</sup> I came upon this comment in turning over the MS. rough copy of the *Life of Mrs. Siddons*, sold at Sotheby's, in 1906, for £21. In his published work, the discreet poet refined it away.

"I have thought myself very unfortunate," she writes to Whalley, "in being unable to see her [Whalley's niece] so often as I wished; but the constant succession of business, and the nonsensical though necessary round of etiquette, visiting, etc., etc., leaves one in London very, very little to use for one's real gratification."

In her prosperity and elation, she never lost sight of the quiet ideals of her private character. Without a shade of insincerity, she writes, "I am still gathering laurels to place round the sweet cottage you and I have planned together, and you will be glad to hear they are variegated with gold; but as I am not ambitious of finery, I shall be glad at a proper time . . . to exchange them for more modest plants." Another day, she exclaims, "Oh, for a piece of Langford brown bread!" Mrs Siddons was never indifferent to food. She was an excellent 'fork.'

The 1782-83 letters to Whalley are dated from lodgings at 149 Strand. A central and tolerably respectable address was essential to her receiving visits from people of any figure in the world. At the theatre, the first run of *Isabella* was not over before she was advanced from her original dressing-room, up a long staircase, to the dressing-room that had been Garrick's.

Her salary commenced at ten guineas a week. Two years later, it was raised to £24, 10s. Undoubtedly, during the first season, her pay was below her value, but she looked to her benefit, on December 14th, and that, made free, as it was, of all charges, brought her over £800. Belvidera, in *Venice Preserved*, was the part she chose for her first benefit, and when, in March 1783, a second was allowed her, she appeared before her patrons as Zara, in Congreve's *The Mourning Bride*, and realised £650 by the performance. As early as November 1782, a hundred barristers, whom she described as 'the whole body of the Law,' made her up a purse of a hundred guineas, which the Hon. Thomas Erskine presented, and she called the episode 'the most shining circumstance of her whole life,' as, formerly, she had said of a subscription raised for her in Bath, 'Was it not elegant?' On December 17th, she issued, from the theatre, a manifesto of gratitude, stating how she had been 'told that the splendid appearance on the night [of her benefit] and the emoluments arising from it, exceed anything ever recorded on

a similar account in the annals of the English stage.' She ended by protesting—as felicitously as such a thing could be protested—that she 'will carefully guard against any approach of pride.' To do her justice, she never, at any time, treated the public in a high-handed way.

During her first season, which concluded on June 5th, she acted eighty times, during her second, fifty-three times. The first year she essayed seven characters, in the following order:—

Isabella (Southerne's *Isabella ; or The Fatal Marriage*, 1694).

Euphrasia (Murphy's *Grecian Daughter*, 1772).

Jane Shore (Rowe's *Jane Shore*, 1713).

Louisa Montague (Hull's *Fatal Interview*, 1782).

Calista (Rowe's *Fair Penitent*, 1703).

Belvidera (Otway's *Venice Preserved*, 1682).

Zara (Congreve's *Mourning Bride*, 1697).

In her Memoranda of 1782–83, occurs one specially understandable remark. Speaking of the overwhelming success, first, of Isabella, then, of her next character, she writes, "I well remember my fears and ready tears on each subsequent effort, lest I should fall from my high exaltation."

Time is the trier of talent, and each new character Mrs. Siddons impersonated more positively proved her Promethean spark to be no penny firework. The glowing, graceful creature, with her marvellously arresting manner and her terrible concentration, recalling Mrs. Cibber in her pathos, rivalling Garrick in all but his universality, "has," wrote Davies, "like a resistless torrent . . . borne down all before her."

## VI

### THE WAY OF HER GENIUS

**S**INCERITY is the pulse of fine acting, and Mrs. Siddons, one of the sincerest of feminine personalities, possessed the quality at the heart of her genius. ~~Anna Seward found that she~~ simply played as a woman of fine understanding and feeling heart would actually look and speak, in the given circumstances, and we may search long through the superabundant correspondence of that pedantic lady for another criticism as discerning and terse.

Mrs. Siddons played from nature, and her own conception, for, ~~of course~~, her apprehension of 'nature' was determined and modified by temperament. ~~That she~~ considered, seriously and attentively, each line she uttered, her manuscript Memoranda on Lady Macbeth, included in Campbell's 'Life' of her, afford collateral assurance. ~~Sir Walter Scott tells us that, when~~ dispraising her brother John's determinedly classic postures, she showed, by practical exposition, that the braced attitude induced by concentrated feeling can be, no matter how un-beautiful, more expressive than the most elaborately graceful *pose plastique*. She stood erect, pressed her knees closely against each other, curved her feet inwards, held her elbows to her sides, placed her hands upright together, and, in this attitude, ~~that of the Egyptian statues Lord Lansdowne had shown her at Lansdowne House,~~ she pronounced Lear's curse. The heightened effect from the narrow, contracted body and the rigidity of the muscles made Scott's 'hair rise and flesh creep.' It is interesting to find the English actress whose name ~~we~~ intimately associate with the classic, static, stately style giving a lesson in realism *à outrance*. We are reminded of Mme

de Staël's kindred comment, in *Corinne*, on the way Mrs. Siddons played the scene in *Isabella*, where she kneels to Count Baldwin:—

*"L'actrice la plus noble dans ses manières, madame Siddons, ne perd rien de sa dignité quand elle se prosterne contre terre. Il n'y a rien qui ne puisse être admirable, quand une émotion intime y entraîne."*

[ Acting consists of two main ingredients, imitation and artistic identification. A mere mimic catches manner and mannerism, a true actor gives the mind with the manner. This power of temporary identification was pre-eminently Mrs. Siddons's. She worked from within outward; first, by yielding herself to the spontaneous flashes of her sensibility, she became the person represented; then, inevitably, brought out the external indications, peculiar and personal.]

[ Other actors marvelled at the well-controlled, self-reserving 'identification' ~~they must have deeply envied~~. Charles Mayne Young, who acted with Mrs. Siddons, gave, in a word, the explanation of it. "She was," he said, "the most *lofty-minded* actress I ever beheld. . . [From the first moment to the last, she was, according to theatric parlance, 'in the character.'"] Various actors are so variously constituted that, while Mrs. Siddons took deliberate pains to maintain, through the intervals between the scenes, the frame of mind proper to the play, Edmund Kean could come out of tragedy, and straightway turn a somersault into the greenroom, and Rachel could parody the thrilling scene she had that moment quitted. [It was not in 'the Great Woman,' as Campbell calls his heroine, to 'frivol' or coolly calculate, in the thick of tragedy.] One could not imagine Garrick's whisper, "Tom, it will do—I see it in their eyes," from her. The soul of the artist in Mrs. Siddons was a deep lake, in Garrick it was a broad, transparent stream. At the ~~same time~~, it was only while she was in the part that she submerged her private self, and then, in Boaden's quaint words, "no recognisance of the most noble of her friends exchanged the character for the individual." Once the fifth act was at an end, she, too, returned to herself, like the rational being she was, and Cumberland, in conversation with Rogers, drew a memory-picture of her coming off the

stage in the flush of triumph, and walking to the mirror in the greenroom to survey her still agitated face.

[Whether speaking or silent, Mrs. Siddons acted, intensely, every moment of the time she was before the audience.] Crabb Robinson describes her, as Margaret of Anjou, when she has stabbed Warwick. "She . . . staggered off the stage as if drunk with delight . . . every limb showed the tumult of passion." She was never afraid to evince physical vigour. Genest noticed that whereas less stalwart actresses, in *Milwood* (Lillo's *George Barnwell*), let themselves be disarmed, almost without a struggle, she rushed past Trueman, and made her way up to Thorowgood, before Trueman could hold her back.

It is clear that her technique came easily to her. Her genius had not, like Irving's, to chip a laborious way through a sheath of personal inaptitudes.

[Her special magic lay in bits of dumb show, neither set down in the text nor in marginal directions. In the *Trial*, in *King Henry the Eighth*, the way in which, as Queen Katharine, she waved aside Cardinal Campeius, and more directly addressed herself to Cardinal Wolsey, made the most memorable moment of the scene.] Similarly, Leigh Hunt noted as the best thing in *The Grecian Daughter* a something out of it which occurred when the heroine had obtained for her imprisoned father unexpected assistance from the guard, Philotas. "Transported with gratitude, but having nothing from the poet to give expression to her feelings, she starts with extended arms and casts herself in mute prostration at his feet." For action so impulsive no one could imagine any rehearsal, and we read of a feeling akin to consternation, on the part of the audience, that such marvellous power in the expression of emotion should be only *acting*.

The words of a dramatist do not supply an actor with much more than half of what he expresses. He has to add to the words colour, light and shade, life. Some people jeer at the proposition that the actor creates. He no more creates a character, say they, than a pianist creates Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*. These people are, in a shallow sense, right. In a profounder sense, they are quite wrong. To their contention Fleeming Jenkin made the best possible reply, when he wrote:—

"Let any reader who thinks that there is some one Hamlet, Shakespeare's Hamlet, who could only speak the speech in one attitude, with one set of tones—open the book, and in the solitude of his chamber try first to find out the emotions which Shakespeare meant his Hamlet to feel, and then try to express those emotions in tones which would indicate them to others. If honest and clever, he will find out after half an hour's study how little the author has done for the actor, how much the actor is called upon to do for the author."<sup>1</sup>

From a copy of *Macbeth* annotated with MS. *marginalia*, I find Professor George Joseph Bell going still farther. "Mrs. Siddons," he wrote, "is not before an audience. Her mind wrought up in high conception of her part—her eyes never wandering—never for a moment idle—passion and sentiment continually betraying themselves. Her words are the accompaniments of her thoughts, scarcely necessary you would imagine to the expression, but highly raising it and giving the full force of poetical effect."

[ Mrs. Siddons played without insisting overmuch upon her own rôle. In any episode of strong action (like the duel between Lothario and Altamont, in Rowe's *Fair Penitent*) where she was not immediately concerned, she would efface herself. Her capacity to evolve for every character its characteristic manners totally preserved her work from that melancholy accompaniment of all but the best-imagined acting, inappropriate business. Nor was she ever known to be trivial, or too detailed, in conditions that demanded exaltation, and oblivion of small surroundings. ]

"No trap, no lure for mean applause is laid;  
No start, no languish to the Pit is paid,"

wrote one of the many tributary poeticules, and to the extraordinary single-mindedness of her acting those best qualified to judge, viz. her fellow-actors, bore witness. Charles Young sounded this noble characteristic when he said, "She never indulged in imagination at the expense of truth." The word, truth, seemed spontaneously to leap up whenever adequate observers described her art. It fulfilled Plato's immortal definition of beauty as the splendour of truth.

<sup>1</sup> *Papers, Literary, Scientific, etc.*, by Fleeming Jenkin, i. 46. 1887.



Lady Charlotte Bury was told, in conversation, of how John Brown, the painter, had asked Mrs. Siddons whether she thought it necessary, in order to produce an effect on the audience, that a part should be acted above the truth of nature. Her reply—as it filtered through three reporters—was as follows: “No, Sir, but undoubtedly up to nature in her highest colours; otherwise, except we performed to audiences composed of such persons as I have now the honour to be conversing with, the effect would not be bold enough in the boxes, nor even in the pit. But to you, Sir, who are a painter, a judge of paintings, I need not explain myself more particularly on this point.”

Because her own personality was simple, Mrs. Siddons was able to give to each of her impersonations an extraordinary unity of design, and this we may take to have been the root quality of every new triumph she made. The parts of the character were subordinated to the whole, and every action and gesture was related to one single mainspring of feeling. This did not make for a variegated style, but it led, most emphatically, to intense and convincing effects.

We find a score of testimonies to a point which, after all, counts for less than an unversed spectator might imagine, viz. the copious tears shed by her. Shakespeare was too familiar with the histrionic temperament to set much store by the fact that the stroller in *Hamlet* wept, and turned pale, for Hecuba. Tom Davies mentions that, in the critical act of *The Fair Penitent*, Mrs. Siddons's increasing pallor was seen through her rouge. Once, at least, in her fictive agitation, as Arpasia, in Rowe's *Tamerlane*, she fainted in earnest, which caused ‘a rush from the pit and boxes to enquire for her.’ Miss Kelly, in the dramatic ‘Recollections’ she gave, in 1833, at the Strand Theatre, told how when Mrs. Siddons, as Constance, used to weep over her (as Arthur) her collar was always wet with tears. Mrs. Siddons was struck by her own facility for crying being greater on some nights than on others. This appears from a letter written by her, and first printed in Payne Collier's *An Old Man's Diary*:—

“1 Nov, 1805

“To speak sincerely, and as it were to myself, making my own confession, I never played more to my own satisfaction

than last night in Belvidera: if I may so say, it was hardly acting, it seemed to me, and I believe to the audience, almost reality; and I can assure you that in one of my scenes with my brother John, who was the Jaffier of the night (a part of which he is not very fond), the real tears 'coursed one another down my innocent nose' so abundantly that my handkerchief was quite wet with them when I got off the stage. . . . I never was more applauded in Belvidera certainly; though, of course, as a piece of mere acting, it is not at all equal to my 'Lady' [Macbeth]. Belvidera, I assure you again, was hardly acting last night: I felt every word as if I were the real person, and not the representative."

[ As is the way with great actors, Mrs. Siddons, in almost every part, gave special vitality to some one line, which stamped it for ever, while, for the playgoer, all surrounding recollections might have faded. Frederick Reynolds speaks of three separate lines she made thrillingly impressive—

in *Venice Preserved*,

"Was it a miserable day?"

in *The Mourning Bride*,

"No—not the Princess' self,"

and, in *King Henry the Eighth*, the widely famed

"Lord cardinal,—  
To you I speak."

Mrs. Trench, the mother of the Archbishop of Dublin, enthusiastically recorded the magical manner in which, in a play whose title, plot, and characters were all forgotten, the great actress said, to a servant who had betrayed her,

"There's gold for thee; but see my face no more."

Some of these instances give an idea of the power Mrs. Siddons must have possessed of vivifying what was in itself lifeless. The power of a true inflection of voice is incalculable, and (as those blessed with oral memory best remember) all the picturesque detail in the world does not move an audience like one sentence, or one cry, given with the right intonation.

Another convincing proof of her grip over the house is the ~~witness we find to her~~ power of preventing the emergence of

any chance ludicrous impression in tragedy. Of a scene in Congreve's *Zara*, for instance, Tom Davies writes:—

"The expressions of anger and resentment, in the captive queen, seldom fail to excite laughter. Mrs. Porter, who was deservedly admired in *Zara*, and Mrs. Pritchard, her successor in that part, could not, with all their skill, prevent the risibility of the audience in this interview. Mrs. Siddons alone preserves the dignity and truth of character, unmixed with any incitement to mirth, from the countenance, expression, or action." }

We read that Clairon, when she advanced to the footlights, could, by the blaze of her eyes, make the (then standing) pit recoil several feet, but, certainly, no other English actress can ever have had such a genius for sheer looking as Sarah Siddons. [ The movements of her eyes anticipated her words, and made a dramatic pause more speaking than the sentence that followed it. No one ever knew better than she how to interpret the silences of Shakespeare. ]

Her artistic pauses of suspense and for the isolation of weighty words were not identical with the more utilitarian pauses she partly made, partly was given by the enthusiastic house, at the end of *crescendo* efforts. Six years after she left Bath, she asked Whalley, who had spent the greater part of the intervening time on the Continent, whether he thought her acting had improved in the interval. He replied in the affirmative, but added (greatly daring) that he regretted to observe she had acquired a stage trick of pausing after certain sentences, to receive the expected applause. In London, throughout the long sequence of years during which she was the idol of fashion, she used definitely to rely upon these interruptions, for rest, and restoration. "Acting Isabella, for instance," said she, "out of London, is double fatigue; there the loud and long applause at the great points and striking situations invigorated the system, and the time it occupied recruited the health and nerve."

In spite of Lady Macbeth, one cannot help imagining that, in wicked characters, Mrs. Siddons must have suffered (in the stage sense) from her own personality. It is hard to believe that she was ever as criminal as Mme Bernhardt is



"MRS. SIDDONS. TRAGIC ACTRESS. PAINTER UNKNOWN"



in *Phèdre*. In *Lady Macbeth*, it is noteworthy that she made—

“Had he not resembled  
My father as he slept I had done 't,”

by the exquisite feeling she put into it, one of the great points in the drama.

It is clear that the simplicity of Mrs. Siddons was different, in kind, from that of the Garrick school. The question that remains for the student of the historical stage is whether, to a modern audience, her effects would not have appeared effects of harsh, melodramatic brilliancy and gigantic, over-emphasised shadow—though, after all that has been cited, the suspicion of any unnaturalness seems a treason. We know that, in theatrical appreciation, fashions change. As to the staginess of John Kemble, condemned even by his contemporaries, there can be no question. We know, moreover, that the family ideal was classic, and a reaction from the flexible impressionism of Garrick and his followers. In her *Record of a Girlhood*, Mrs. Kemble states what the family ideal was—

“... A noble ideal beauty was what we were taught to consider the proper object and result of all art. In their especial vocation this tendency caused my family to be accused of formalism and artificial pedantry; and the so-called ‘classical’ school of acting, to which they belonged, has frequently since their time been unfavourably compared with what, by way of contrast, has been termed the realistic or natural style of art.”

In Mrs. Siddons's own day there was a minority who dissented from the general laudations of her naturalness. One who belonged to this minority was Abraham Hayward's ‘*Lady of Quality*,’ Miss Wynn. She wrote:—

“Mrs. Siddons in her prime is certainly a bright recollection, but I did not feel for her acting quite the enthusiasm that most people profess. It was too artificial for my taste: her attitudes were fine and graceful, but they always seemed to me the result of study.”

Such criticisms as this must be taken into consideration. On the other hand, we may remember Mrs. Clive's ringing verdict that her acting was ‘all truth and daylight,’ a judgment

particularly weighty, as proceeding from a woman of strong understanding, who had herself been a princess among the impressionists. We have to separate the ranting contemporary tragedies in which Mrs. Siddons played from herself and her method of playing them. We may also bear in mind that the too familiar anecdotes of her stilted phraseology in everyday life are not proofs of her having been stagy in the theatre.

The balance of probability inclines one to think that the greatness of her imagination irradiated a conception and method which, in the hands of a player endowed merely with talent, would have lacked power to represent the variety and play of life. We might, perhaps, venture so far as to think that, great tragic actress as Mrs. Siddons was, she might have been, in her tragedy, still greater if, in her personality, she had possessed a few grains more of humour and of comedy. Stage tragedy which rarely admits even irony to temper it is, of necessity, perilously far removed from the natural world over which God's good sun shines. But here, again, genius such as Mrs. Siddons's, like nature itself, harmonises contradictions, and makes whatever it does seem right. While her audiences gazed at her, they felt greatness, as, in our day, we felt greatness in Henry Irving.

[ Fire is the quality that distinguishes the great from the merely good player, and it was this in Mrs. Siddons which raised her acting far above Kemble's. With her, however elaborate her previous study, it was always, in the result, pains-concealing, thanks to her unfailing capacity for momentary fire. Hers was not the kind of nature that wastes its nervous force over afterthoughts and uncertainties.] We have too little record as to how she accepted suggestions from authoritative outsiders. We know that when Sheridan, her Manager, tried to make her alter her action of setting down the candlestick in the sleep-walking scene, she was obdurate. We are left to believe that she principally relied on herself in matters that belonged to her own scope.

[ It is well worth noticing that her art bore two fruitages. The first was the expression of what Boaden terms 'gentle domestic woe,' the second was the expression of earth-shaking Shakespearean characters, Constance and Lady Macbeth,

mellowing, more and more, as her physique altered, into Queen Katharine and Volumnia. ] We have it from Horace Walpole that when, during her earlier period, she was asked to play Lady Macbeth and Glover's Medea, she replied, 'No, she did not look on them as female characters.'

The Ettrick Shepherd, in apology for the defective plots of his stories, represented himself saying to Scott, "Dear Mr. Scott, a man canna do the thing that he canna do." In the case of a woman it is much the same. The misfortune is that, by some malice of their *lutins*, both men and women appear impelled to do, for their own gratification, not the thing they can, but the thing they 'canna.' And thus Mrs. Siddons too long remained unpersuaded as to her inferiority in comedy. No outsider was influential enough to limit her Rosalind and Lady Restless to theatres outside London, as Rachel's advisers limited her Celimène to theatres outside Paris.

Mrs. Siddons's was an age of genuinely comic actresses. The names of Abington, Farren, and Jordan recall a trio of comedy queens, variously gifted. To many persons, including the present writer, perfect comedy acting appears a higher and maturer thing than the finest tragedy. Tragedy acting is emotional, whereas comedy must be intellectual. But the actor has never lived who was equally great in both. Garrick, in all probability, was at his best when he did not go deep below the surface. His expression in *Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy* leaves no doubt as to what so keen an observer as Reynolds deemed his stronger gift.

Mrs. Siddons's comedy always appeared forced. It was a conscious unbending, as though Thalia were Melpomene's schoolgirl sister. The idea of Mrs. Siddons acting, as she did, Mrs. Riot in a trivial burlesque like Garrick's *Lethe* is unseemly, and even shocking. "Who," said a gentleman, speaking of this to Lady Charlotte Campbell, "would have wished to see Sir Isaac Newton auditing the accounts of the mint? or who would enter into the enjoyments of a catch or a glee sung by Lord Chief Justice Mansfield; or a solo on the German flute by the King of Prussia; or a fandango danced by the Empress of Russia?"

It must be easier to act tragedy than comedy. *Macbeth*



almost acts itself, and it was Macready's pet remark that no actor ever failed as Hamlet; but to act Lady Teazle, or Mrs. Millamant, delicate judgment, vivacity, and breeding are required. Mrs. Siddons had not the sprightliness, or natural gaiety of disposition, that is indispensable for success in comedy, nor did she possess the great comedy 'gift of pace' on which Miss Ellen Terry, in her Autobiography, laid so much stress.

Had she been a good comedian she would have made a more competent woman of society, where all expression is high comedy. She lacked the necessary versatility. At drums, she was apt to remain heavily silent. Witness Campbell's account of her, at a reception in Paris, in 1814, standing, for some noticeable length of time, mumchance beside the Duke of Wellington, 'after a first mutual recognizance.' She was grave by nature. Her temperament was a tragedy temperament, her face a tragedy face.

We read that she could, 'in her slow way,' tell laughable stories laughably, or, even (having first 'ordered the parlour-door to be made fast'), give the speeches of Sir Anthony Absolute so as to convulse a family party; and that she was not without a limited, unrejoicing sense of humour is further demonstrated by passages in her correspondence, as, for instance, the long description she gives of the woman who, in August 1782, rode in the stage coach with her, from Bath to Weymouth, of which this sentence is a sample: "Her neck, which was a thin scrag of a quarter of a yard long, and the colour of a walnut, she wore uncovered for the solace of all beholders." To this we may candidly prefer Campbell's assurance that Mrs. Siddons was not too vain or solemn to join in the general laugh on herself when, in a dismal tragedy, having to make an ardent exit with a baby in her arms, she set a precedent for Tilly Slowboy by knocking the baby's wooden head—and with a resounding thud—against the doorpost.

## VII

### SOME EARLY PARTS

ANY ONE who has inherited that whitish elephant, an eighteenth century library, must have been struck by the extent to which its play-books outnumber its novels. In Mrs. Siddons's day, every play that ran nine nights appeared, shortly afterwards, in book form. "The crowd at a manager's door electrically acts upon a publisher's," wrote an anxious—and successful—dramatist, Mrs. Inchbald. An unacted tragedy was never bought. Evidently, there was no demand for a drama for mental performance only, though Byron thought there was room for something of the kind, and Scott wrote, in a letter to Allan Cunningham, "We certainly do not always read with the greatest pleasure those plays which act best."

A century and one or two decades ago, at Drury Lane or Covent Garden, an author received £33, 6s. 8d. for the first nine nights of his play, with the further agreement that, if the play failed to bring £200 a night, the proprietors were at liberty to withdraw it. 'Acting rights' were, as yet, inchoate and ill-defined.

If, throughout Mrs. Siddons's life, she had acted in none but Shakespeare's plays, it would be possible to write of her interpretation of women, her delivery of lines, her 'business' in scenes, with a hope of being readable; if, even, her non-Shakespearean parts had been as near actuality as those of Mr. Barrie, Mr. Galsworthy, and Mr. Bernard Shaw, the commentator would still be able to call up characters possessing something that may fairly be termed momentum. But the tongues of angels would hardly avail to arouse curiosity concerning either Congreve's *Zara* (*The Mourning Bride*) or Aaron Hill's *Zara* (*Zara*, adapted from Voltaire's '*Zaire*'), still less,

concerning two characters whose names are so bewilderingly alike as Arpasia (Rowe's *Tamerlane*) and Euphrasia (Murphy's *Grecian Daughter*). What is remarkable is that our, in other directions, level-headed ancestors should have cared to see even Mrs. Siddons, 'every week,'<sup>1</sup> in one of these simulacra of classicality, when, nowadays, such solid antiques as Julius Cæsar, Cleopatra, Nero, and Ulysses require, to bring houses, the utmost aid from Mr. Joseph Harker, Mr. Percy Macquoid, and the machinist.

Not counting Hull, four of Mrs. Siddons's five first season authors were already classics, viz. Southerne, Otway, Congreve, and Rowe, and their heroines stock characters. Murphy, alone, was contemporary with the actress, and no one, then or now, could hopefully contend that his *Grecian Daughter* was comparable to the work of the elder men. As eighteenth century acting greatened to Garrick and Siddons, eighteenth century tragedy proportionately deteriorated.

Next to Southerne's *Isabella*, there was no part in Mrs. Siddons's repertory she made more impressive than Belvidera in Otway's *Venice Preserved*. Not only did the ultra-susceptible Anna Seward's tears fall 'in full and ceaseless streams' over this 'soul-harrowing' impersonation; it drew half-stifled sobs from all London. When, in 1786, Mrs. Siddons made a single and 'complimentary' appearance at Covent Garden (with the pit at box prices) for the benefit of the widow of Henderson—untimely cut off four months earlier—it was on Belvidera she relied to attract a packed and profitable house. One of the longest female parts in English drama, it would be hard to find another so opulent—as actors say, so juicy—for a competent representative. Elizabeth Barry, Susanna Cibber, and Anne Barry had, each in turn, made a *chef d'œuvre* of Belvidera.

The central idea—the *donnée* of *Venice Preserved* is, it may be remembered, the shame and downfall brought upon an originally noble nature, by excessive uxoriousness—a unique theme, as far as I know, in acting drama. Belvidera's husband, Jaffier, engages, for her sake, in a murderous conspiracy against the Venetian senate, of which her unfatherly father is a member.

<sup>1</sup> and cried their 'eyes out every time'—Horace Walpole to Mason, December 7th, 1782.

A few hours later, Jaffier, yielding to her importunities, betrays his accomplices, among whom is his close friend, Pierre. The finest scene in the play is the dialogue, on Pierre's scaffold, between these two men.

Since the days of Dick Minim, Johnson's Critic who blamed Otway 'for making a conspirator his hero,' opinions on the character of Belvidera have differed. Roden Noel considered her 'own sister to Cordelia, Imogen, Desdemona.' Walter Scott believed she had rightly drawn more tears than Juliet. Lord Byron, who described himself as, elsewhere, a great admirer of Otway, styled Belvidera (and the fact that she was an imaginary character may, perhaps, excuse the quotation of his energetic phraseology) "that maudlin bitch of chaste lewdness and blubbering curiosity whom I utterly despise, abhor, and detest."

It may be noted that Mrs. Siddons's fame for pathos is founded on parts outside Shakespeare. In *Venice Preserved*, the three speeches, all of the briefest, she wrote in letters of fire, were 'O, thou unkind one!' when Jaffier makes her a hostage for his good faith with the conspirators, 'My father!' when she learns the purpose and extent of the conspiracy—into these words which she repeated, from Jaffier's 'To kill thy father,' she put a horror that chilled the blood—and, finally, the much-praised 'Remember twelve!' when she is hoping, by wifely tenderness, to undermine her husband's oath.

With her superlative power of self-excitation, splendid presence, and a face malleable to every development of Otway's story, she was, one can entirely believe, 'electrifying,' as Boaden says, at the moment when Jaffier (in remorse at having betrayed Pierre) threatens to stab her, and she springs into his arms, with

"Now then, kill me!"

In Otway's *The Orphan*, she played the character in which the whole interest centres. In this drama of a wronged wife, painful and 'unpleasant' though it is, she found a part more truly sympathetic to her personality than Belvidera. It was, from the theatrical standpoint, less effective, and, moreover, the action of *The Orphan* suffers from that gravest of dramatic faults, inadequate causation. Yet an actress could hardly hope

for lovelier lines, outside Shakespeare, than occur in Monimia's dying scene—

“I'm here; who calls me?

Methought I heard a voice

Sweet as the shepherd's pipe upon the mountains,  
When all his little flock's at feed before him.

When I'm laid low i' the grave, and quite forgotten,  
Mayst thou be happy in a fairer bride!

But none can ever love thee like Monimia.

When I am dead,—as presently I shall be,

For the grim tyrant grasps my heart already,—

Speak well of me; and if thou find ill tongues

Too busy with my fame, don't hear me wronged;

'Twill be a noble justice to the memory

Of a poor wretch once honoured with thy love.

How my head swims!—'tis very dark. Good-night!”

It was not in Otway, but in Congreve, that Dr. Johnson, when giving his better judgment one of its recurrent holidays, discovered the ‘paragraph’ he declared superior to any other descriptive passage in English poetry. To modern readers, Congreve stands for the creator of, in one sense, the purest comedy that exists, the mordant comedy, and, in spite of Lamb's plea, the grim, real comedy, of Lady Wishfort and Witwoud and Millamant, while we regard his one tragedy as uninspired and negligible. Yet it is worth remembering that *The Mourning Bride* contains, in addition to Johnson's piece about the cathedral, one of the best-known couplets in English drama—and never was couplet better adapted to an explosive exit, viz.—

“Heav'n has no rage like love to hatred turn'd,  
Nor Hell a fury like a woman scorn'd,”

and, moreover, opens with one of the most hackneyed lines in poetry,

“Music has charms to soothe a savage breast.”

All through, there is no penury of ideas in *The Mourning Bride*, and with Zara, the more vehement of its two female characters, executed in the grand style of Mrs. Siddons, without puny graces or small originalities, it was, to the taste of our great-grandsires, an impressive performance. In reading the play, the captive Moorish queen appears merely

a tigress; Mrs. Siddons, at least, made her a magnificent tigress. Godwin told Campbell it was worth a day's journey to see her walk down the stage in *The Mourning Bride*. In the last scene, Zara makes away with herself by means of 'the bowl,' and here Mrs. Siddons went in for painful physical realism—as she also did in the fifth act of *Jane Shore*. No previous actress had thrown such variety into death. Some one who saw her Zara in Dublin wrote, naively, but convincingly, as follows:—

"Her resolution of mind visible on drinking the poison, at the same time the natural antipathy she showed to it, was strikingly just; but the apparent working of the deadly draught was beyond any representation I ever beheld; at that moment I quite forgot the exalted soul of the beautiful Zara, and could only feel for the agony and torture under which a fellow-creature suffered."

On Mrs. Siddons's other Zara there seems no need to dwell, beyond observing that it argues more vitality and inspiration than words can say on the part of Mrs. Cibber, Spranger Barry, Garrick, and Mrs. Siddons that they, each in turn, made so dull an affair as Hill's adaptation from Voltaire seem puissant and alive. "A great actor," said Mme de Staël, speaking, particularly, of Talma, "becomes, by his accents and his physiognomy, the second author of his parts." Far more than apparent authorship—which an actor of later eighteenth century drama might reasonably have repudiated—was done for *Zara* by the artists just mentioned. By the splendour of their own imagination, they hypnotised the audience into taking a piece of green cheese for the moon.

Another of Mrs. Siddons's earlier dramatists was Nicholas Rowe, who, while beneath the great how far, quite understood the trick of the scene, the *science des planches*. Of the six inherited stock characters of Mrs. Siddons's first season, Isabella (Southerne's), Belvidera, Monimia, Zara, Calista, and Jane Shore, a person of to-day would, in all probability, choose to see Rowe's Jane Shore. We should know, beforehand, something about the lady. Glamour invests the name of every king's mistress, world without end.

Rowe's play, which still, in 1909, holds the stage, in the provinces, contains effective scenes and some clever characterisa-

tion. The only part that lacks the smallest relief is 'Glo'ster,' and he is such unadulterated transpontine Crookback that one might imagine Rowe had never studied the rich *arpeggio* passages of intellectuality and irony whereby Shakespeare created a man in him.

Mrs. Siddons did tremendous things with Jane Shore. The scene opens when the protagonist is no longer Edward V's pretty Jane, but poor Jane, as the epilogue, with an epilogue's customary contemptuousness, names her, of the Ricardian dispensation. Only an original actress could redeem the long-drawn whimpering of the part, as it stands in the Works of Rowe. One of its best touches—'a little burst of genius'—is where Jane Shore flames up in a blessing upon Hastings, who, while he persecutes her, defends and protects the late king's children. But for this generous episode, Mrs. Siddons had to throw all the variety she could into the monotonous part of an outlawed Magdalen, knocking at unopening doors, ragged and famished, till, at last, she was called upon to assume the pinched face and dead voice of a human being, perishing from hunger upon the cobbles of the streets. Here, "she excited," says Miss Wynn, "that deep thrill of horror which made my blood tingle at my fingers' end." In connection with the same scene, another eye-witness gives a vivid impression of how Mrs. Siddons, like every artist capable of intense and self-forgetting ideas, could, at times,<sup>1</sup> make a complete sacrifice of beauty to realism, *i.e.* fidelity to nature. From the moment of Jane Shore's outlawry, says this anonymous lady writer:—

"Mrs. Siddons ceases to excite pleasure by her appearance. I absolutely thought her the creature perishing through want, 'fainting from loss of food';—shocked at the sight, I could not avoid turning from the suffering object; I was disgusted at the idea, that an event affecting our mortal frame only, should be capable of producing greater misery than the most poignant anguish of the mind."

Speaking of Mrs. Siddons's Calista, in *The Fair Penitent* (Rowe's disimprovement of Massinger's *The Fatal Dowry*), one of her devotees said it would be worth sitting out the piece for her scene with Horatio, in order to see 'such a splendid animal

<sup>1</sup> As, again, in the part of Volumnia. See Young's statement, p. 130.

in such a magnificent rage.' This was the part Miss Seward described to Whalley as the most wonderful in Mrs. Siddons's repertory, because of its 'conflicting and sublime variety of passions.' Certainly, it remained a safe card onwards from the first season to a comparatively late date.<sup>1</sup>

Turning from these comparatively classic tragedies to some more recently, and some contemporaneously written, let us see what Mrs. Siddons made of Murphy's *Grecian Daughter* (originally produced in 1772) and a few others of less mark, before examining the records of her handling of a celebrated part, Lady Randolph, in Home's *Douglas*. Again omitting the heroine of Hull's *Fatal Interview*, not one of the characters she played during her first season was 'created' by her, in the technical sense of having owed to her its original impersonation in London.

The part of Euphrasia, in *The Grecian Daughter*, was, as we have seen, familiar to her before she came back to London, and, since she desired to make her first night's appearance in it, no doubt it was the rôle in which she most 'fancied' herself. Murphy's tragedy is founded on the familiar legend of the Grecian daughter, whose starving father became her nursling, in that (her baby having been torn from her breast by the tyrant who made the old man captive) she fed him as she would have fed the infant—a situation which, even in description, would seem to call for deft stage guidance to steer it clear of absurdity. Nevertheless, though the tragedy is unoriginal in style and unveracious in feeling, it must be believed that it made, in its time, a good stage play. Murphy was a member of Garrick's Drury Lane company, and, other things being equal, an actor—take Shakespeare or Molière as instances!—produces better stage plays than a merely literary person, even be he a Browning or a Tennyson, owing to his closer acquaintance with the stagecraft side of drama.

"Wild with her grief, and terrible with wrongs,"

as she describes herself, Euphrasia may well have been too strutting an Amazon, but we have seen that the part appealed to Mrs. Siddons, as all family sentiment so surely did. The character,

<sup>1</sup> I cannot find that Mrs. Siddons acted Calista later than October 22nd, 1805.



in its virtuous energy, suited her heroic mould, she seemed in it a Greek worthy of the Parthenon, and the force of her acting, idealising the nerveless stuff she had to utter, 'enchained' the Play-followers (to use a phrase of Foote's) 'in a silent rapture only fearful of its own applause.' It was unfortunate that Murphy should have required her to cry, after she has stabbed Dionysius,

"Lo! there the wonders of Euphrasia's arm,"

and we can only suppose that the Play-followers were as destitute of humour as the author to let such a line pass.

After a severe course of imperial tragedy, it was only human in the playgoing public to welcome, with a sigh of relief, a drama of contemporary private life. On November 22nd, 1783, early in her second season, Mrs. Siddons revived Moore's *The Gamester*, acting, on that night, for the first time in London, with her brother, John, who played Beverley, the part Garrick had created. Mrs. Siddons was Mrs. Beverley, and now, and for the next twenty-nine years, she made the character the most thrilling and real of all her wifely parts, outside Shakespeare. Moore's play was ultrasad, but it contained a genuine idea, and the colloquial simplicity of its prose strengthened its effectiveness, after so many 'Ye Gods!' in the other tragedies.

Mrs. Siddons's art, commented on by all who ever saw her act, of heightening unimaginative language till it 'rose to touch the spheres,' found great scope in *The Gamester*, and detached sentences from it, which seem, when read, bald and unconvincing, were lovingly quoted by 'old playgoers,' as having been the peculiar triumphs of her characterisation of the fond, conciliating, perfect wife. All acting should seem to be improvisation. Perhaps, in an ideal state, the two would count as one art. As Mrs. Beverley, Mrs. Siddons seemed to be improvising every syllable. I am reminded of how far it is from being the case that the finest piece makes the finest acting, when I reflect that the moment many 'old playgoers' would most wish to crystallise among their memories of Miss Ellen Terry's playing is when, in W. G. Wills's skilful, but, in itself, quite soulless adaptation of *The*

*Vicar of Wakefield*, she, as Olivia, stooped to wipe her little brother's eyes.

In *The Gamester*, the great moment, unassisted, unfettered by speech, came at the end, and, here, the widow's stare of misery beside her gambler husband's corpse was likened, by Leigh Hunt, to nothing less than 'the bewildered melancholy' of the same actress in the *Macbeth* sleep-walking scene. *Macready's Reminiscences* gives a detailed account of Mrs. Siddons's Mrs. Beverley, for Macready had the advantage of playing Beverley to her Mrs. Beverley, for one night, at Newcastle, in 1812, when her sun was about to set, and his to rise. Of the last scene, he writes:—

"Her glaring eyes were fixed in stony blankness on his [*i.e.* Beverley's] face; the powers of life seemed suspended in her; her sister and Lewson gently raised her, and slowly led her unresisting from the body, her gaze never for an instant averted from it; when they reached the prison door she stopped, as if awakened from a trance, with a shriek of agony that would have pierced the hardest heart, and, rushing from them,<sup>1</sup> flung herself as if for union in death, on the prostrate form before her."

The perennial cry, 'Decline of the Drama,' was active during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, *et pour cause*. 'The Siddons' had no Voltaire, as La Clairon had, to write her plays, and address letters of criticism and encouragement to her. With the possible exception of *The Stranger*, a play translated from the German, the novelties of her own day did little for her fame.

It was inevitable that the literary-minded friend should, from the start, pester her with his manuscript tragedy, or with a precursory letter to say he had 'a tragedy in great forwardness.' Amateur authors are of two types, the one resembling the mountain in labour, the other as ludicrously oblivious of the fact that success connotes effort. It was harder for the pinnacled actress, the sister of Drury Lane's Manager, to return what John Murray II, in a letter to Byron, termed 'a civil and

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Siddons always instructed an inexperienced Jarvis (the old servant) to hold her tightly at this point, on account of her dramatic energy and great physical strength.

delicate declension' to applications from persons of the first type than to airy proposals of something in her way written while the author's hair was dressing.

Among personal acquaintances we have met already, who, at one time or another, aimed at the high preferment of Mrs. Siddons's acceptance of their tragedies, was Bertie Greathed, of Guy's Cliffe, Esquire, Italianate and Della Cruscan, the son of Mrs. Siddons's *padrona* of long ago. Since the emergence of the Kemble sister and brother, they had revived, and strongly cemented, their relations with the gracious and hospitable owners of the historic retreat beside the Avon.

Bertie Greathed's accepted tragedy, *The Regent*, was produced at a date—March 17th, 1788—that made its title, before all things, 'topical.' 'Excellent in parts,' the piece had been written expressly for, and, it was said, under the presiding inspiration of, John Kemble. At any rate, Kemble was the Regent, and Mrs. Siddons was Dianora, the heroine.

One of the characters, asked where the king was, replied—

" Within his tent, surrounded by a friend  
Or two " !

Gifford fell upon the play, in his customary style—horse and foot, artillery and camp-followers—but, even without Gifford, a tragedy that contained several such howlers was foredoomed. It crawled through two nights, and then, prompted by a gradually increasing buzz of inattention from boxes, pit, and galleries, Mrs. Siddons discreetly retired from her part, on the plea of indisposition. In those days, no one boggled at that ambiguous word, and the actress saved her friend, already banqueting at the Brown Bear, Bow Street, over a supposed success, the dismay of finding that his piece was being played to empty benches. Her indisposition, combining with the public's, practically made an end of *The Regent*, though it was announced as held over till April 26th, and was, actually, played, in all, eight times.<sup>1</sup>

Whalley was another private friend, who 'landed' Mrs. Siddons with an impossible tragedy—the tragedy of a thorough-paced amateur. Following fashion's romantic wave—ruined

<sup>1</sup> Genest mistakenly says (vi. 477) it was 'acted but once'—April 1st.

turrets and broken bridges were the rage in 1799—the piece was called *The Castle of Montval*, but its plot was already cut from under it by ‘Monk’ Lewis’s *The Castle Spectre*, recently successfully produced.

In Whalley’s tragedy, a castle contains one room into which the owner, a Bluebeard II, forbids his bride, during his absence, to penetrate. Left alone, furnished with a bunch of keys, and hearing moans issuing from the forbidden chamber, the lady, accompanied, as far as the door, by a devoted seneschal, enters it. Within, she finds an incarcerated, venerable, and unexpected father-in-law, whom she greets with the not unnatural question, “Are you the ghost?” In conclusion,

“The hero raves, the heroine cries,  
All stab, and everybody dies.”

Mrs. Siddons and John and Charles Kemble, the last-named already observed as a studious and improving young actor, did their utmost for Whalley’s tragedy, but the wonder is that it lived eight nights. An exasperating custom prevailed on the part of Managers of advertising a mild failure, next day, as a success. It was partly from this cause that first night damnations became so violent.

Mrs. Siddons’s impersonation of Lady Randolph, in *Douglas*, first undertaken by her on December 22nd, 1783, put the final seal on her reputation. In deciding to play this part she challenged the, as yet, definitively unconquered Mrs. Crawford, whose chief estate, almost whose monopoly, Lady Randolph had become. The direct contest was inevitable, and Mrs. Siddons was well advised in entering upon it when and how she did. On the whole, she triumphed. Mrs. Crawford had been a fine, impassioned Lady Randolph, but, wherever the acting or the two most differed, there, it was felt, Shakespeare’s standard and test of dramatic art, the modesty of nature, declared for Mrs. Siddons.

Among the historic sentences of the stage, comparable with Henderson’s

“The fair Ophelia!”

and Mrs. Siddons’s

“Lord cardinal,—  
To you I speak,”

old playgoers counted Mrs. Crawford's

"Was he alive?"

when, as Lady Randolph, she listened to the prisoner's account of the adventure to which her lost, and, as yet, unrecovered, son had been, in infancy, subjected. Mrs. Crawford shrieked "Was he alive?" on an irresistible maternal impulse, and Bannister says he once saw half the pit start to its feet at her 'heart-gushing' cry. Mrs. Siddons took the sentence in a different key. She remembered that Lady Randolph was bound not to reveal herself as the boy's mother, and such secrecy had become habitual. "Was he alive?" she murmured, in a half-annihilated tone, as when the heart stands still, and one speaks what one feels, not what one ought to say. Her question was (to Home's credit) a profound representation of instinct, thinking aloud, for Lady Randolph does not seriously believe Old Norval's assurance—

"He was,"

since she instantly hurls back—

"Inhuman that thou art!

How could'st thou kill what waves and tempests spared?"

so proving that the inquiry could not have been, as Mrs. Crawford interpreted it, the sudden, rushing need to inform herself of his safety. Furthermore, Mrs. Siddons's faint articulation of

"Was he alive?"

suggested that Lady Randolph's long endurance, its agony intensified by the details of her child's perils, just listened to in the shepherd's story, was at last at breaking-point. Here, as elsewhere, her acting was truthfully imagined, though, by those who, still, held by Mrs. Crawford's, her rendition of the part was, naturally, censured. Her 'starts and stares' were objected to, and so was the motion of her head, 'which seems to dance upon elastic wire, like that of Punch's antic Queen.'

On what principle did Mrs. Siddons accept or reject dramatic parts? She very properly avoided characters in which there was what Garrick called 'a lofty disregard of nature,' but she believed, as she told the inquiring 'Lady L' [ucan?] that, if a

part seemed at all within nature, something might be made out of it. Where there was opportunity for genuine passion, she knew she could grip the house, though here something might have to be set in stronger relief than the author had indicated, and there, something slurred or deleted. A great player creates, in part, by selection. The degree of skill in selection—which means the envisagement, the general handling of the part—largely determines the player's rank as an artist.

We picture Mrs. Siddons running her eye down the pages of a new tragedy, and, gradually, losing herself in the state of exaltation actors induce at will, the ever-renewed power to adopt an imaginary personality, and relinquish, for the passing hour, their own. As every writer on the histrionic temperament has pointed out since Diderot published his '*Paradoxe*,' the player's art is representation, not identification, and, indeed, the simple fact that nothing on the stage is carried to a legitimate conclusion, that the slain Hamlet does not really die, nor the distraught Ophelia drift across the footlights, proves that the player only *plays* the part. Since, broadly speaking, his effects depend on his being (like ice) at the same time melting and cold, the first measure of his greatness as an artist is his impressibility, the second, his control over it. Not only actors, but painters, sculptors, writers, are in a tale here. What that much misused phrase, the Artistic Temperament, rightly means is the gift all these people possess to enter into, and reproduce feeling other than their own. It is mental, in contradistinction to moral, sympathy that makes the artist. "*C'est un certain tempérament de bon sens et de chaleur qui fait l'acteur sublime.*"

Yet the nobler and more imaginative the player, the more intensely does he recast his own individuality, and pour himself, mind and body, into moulds not his. Brief though such impersonations are, it is impossible—in spite of Diderot—not to believe that, little by little, they impair the original tissue, and leave the player, by dint of becoming many, something less than one. The slightness of the extent to which this disintegrative process operated in the case of Mrs. Siddons is one of the most remarkable facts about her psychological history. She maintained, behind her many parts, a particularly definite

individuality, literal and unaffluent it is true, but grappling with what hooks she had (as Johnson said of Baretti) very forcibly. When, early in her first season, Lord Carlisle carried her what Walpole calls 'the tribute-money' from Brooks's, he said she was not *manière* enough. Alone among actresses, she was nothing of an actress off the stage.

## VIII

### HER STARRING EXPERIENCES

**J**OHAN KEMBLE was acting, with distinguished applause, in Dublin, and mixing there in the best society, throughout Mrs. Siddons's triumphant first winter in London. At a dinner in the apartments of Walpole's friend, Captain Jephson, the playwright equerry, in Dublin Castle, Lord Inchiquin gave as a toast 'the matchless Siddons,' and, drawing from his finger a ring, containing her portrait, set in diamonds, sent it on a salver to Mr. Kemble, to desire his opinion of the likeness. Where this was the preparative tone in dominant circles, a starring visit was markedly 'indicated.'

Early in June, 1783, Mrs. Siddons, accompanied by Mr. Siddons as her natural protector; William Brereton as a 'First Serious' subsidiary to Kemble; Francis Aickin, invaluable in such parts as needed to be 'manly, polite, earnest, and sensible'; and one of her sisters, as her private and stage confidante, crossed the Irish Channel. It was the first time she had set foot on the sliding sea. "I never felt the majesty of the Divine Creator so fully before. I was dreadfully sick," she wrote to Whalley, and, on the strength of her single experience, proceeded to give her friend 'a little wholesome advice' against a similar capitulation. "Allways (you see I have forgot to spell) go to bed the instant you go on board, for by lying horizontally, and keeping very quiet, you cheat the sea of half its influence."

Her sufferings were not ended on her reaching the Dublin landing-stage, on June 16th. The party arrived, after a stormy passage, at 12.30 a.m. The rain was streaming down, and, instead of being driven to a comfortable inn, Mrs. Siddons and Miss Kemble, after spending an hour and a half in the



'dungeon' of a Custom house, had to walk about the wet streets, looking for a shelter that, at two in the morning, seemed momentarily more unlikely. At last, they were taken in at the house where Brereton's father, Major Brereton, a Dublin resident, had secured his son a bed, the landlady repeatedly protesting that it was contrary to her rule to entertain ladies.

Naturally, Mrs. Siddons's first impression of the Irish capital was unfavourable. She roundly called it 'a sink of filthiness.' And her unfavourable impression did not, altogether, wear off as time went on. She took against the people. "They are all ostentation and insincerity, and in their ideas of finery very like the French, but not so cleanly. They are tenacious of their country to a degree of folly that is very laughable." Thus she wrote, for transmission abroad, on July 14th. As it chanced, she omitted to prepay the postage on these treasonable opinions, and the letter was officially opened in Ireland.

In pursuance of his custom of paying an annual visit to London to recruit his company, Daly, then Manager of the Smock Alley Theatre, had personally been over to clinch an engagement with Mrs. Siddons. Most probably, he went during 'the Passion Week,' when all the Managers who wanted people, and all the actors who wanted employment, habitually assembled in London.

Once more, Mrs. Siddons led off with Southerne's *Isabella*. This was on June 21st.<sup>1</sup> Seats were at fancy prices. In a 'humourous Account' of her reception (published after the second night) included in the miscellany entitled *Edwin's Pills to Purge Melancholy*, among a number of less apposite epithets, she is termed "this Moon of blank verse! this Queen and Princess of tears! this World of weeping clouds! this Juno of commanding aspect! this Proserpine of fire and earthquake!" The tone is intentionally insolent. In all probability, Peter Seguin, the author (who manifests more than the average Irishman's lack of humour) was a partisan of Mrs. Crawford.

A note to the pasquinade states that, when it first appeared, 'The lady's friends were outrageous against the author,' who long 'kept himself 'snug,' and let others have

<sup>1</sup> Boaden says, June 20th.

the discredit of it. Though it was, no doubt, in effect, libellous to describe a few hisses on the second night as authoritative, it yet seems clear that Mrs. Siddons did not, at once, become Dublin's universal idol. In every theatre outside London, the starring player, the 'exotic,' has to run the gauntlet of a natural cavil against London's verdict of merit. It must be acknowledged that, in spite of her magnetism of sheer power, Mrs. Siddons lacked the quality better fitted to win the Irish vote—*bonhomie*. The rougher element in an Irish audience loved to put itself in personal relations with the actors on the boards. Lady Morgan's (and Macready's) story of the man who, in the friendliest spirit, stage-whispered to Laurence Clinch, as Lothario, from the gallery, "Larry, honey, there's the laste taste in life of yer shirt got out behind you," symbolises much. At Cork, the galleries tried a little familiarity with Mrs. Siddons. "Sally, me jewel, how 'are you?" sang out some one. But Mrs. Siddons, like the lady in the grammatical example of the force of the comma, walked on her head a little higher than usual.

The fresh actress had to conquer the disadvantage of being English, before an audience accustomed to applaud first-rate performers who were also Irish. Practically all the best later eighteenth century players, with the exception of the two greatest, were of Hibernian extraction. It was not easy for the newcomer to displace Mrs. Crawford (who, just before, had been acting at the selfsame theatre) in her ancient stronghold, whence, in 1803, two years after she died, the last attempt to prove her superiority emanated—in 'Funereal Stanzas,' strongly dwelling on her 'nature's genuine glow,' in contradistinction to Mrs. Siddons's 'mock-gems, produc'd from stone.'

Mrs. Siddons's season terminated, says Charles Lee Lewes (the grandfather of George Eliot's Lewes) on the twelfth night, or thereabouts. She then went on to Cork, accompanied by her brother, John. His three years' engagement at Drury Lane was just signed.

Within about ten weeks, Mrs. Siddons made £1000 out of Irish admiration of her art, so that, in spite of a little

journalistic malice, probably due to pro-Crawford prejudice, at the outset, she very sensibly thought her first visit to Ireland a success, and arranged to go there again for a longer period the following year.

From 1783 onwards until 1805, she paid six visits to Dublin. A pseudonymous booklet, entitled *The Beauties of Mrs. Siddons*, gives, in the form of letters, one dealing with each rôle, a warmly laudatory account of her Dublin appearances during 1785, when she went through a repertory of six characters, Belvidera, Zara, Isabella, Margaret of Anjou, Jane Shore, and Lady Randolph. From chance records we gather that she woke more general Irish enthusiasm away from Dublin. She was described, by Francis Twiss, as finishing her engagement in Belfast in 1785, 'with most uncommon *éclat*.' Every night the whole of the pit had been turned into boxes—not a single hat visible.

In the world of society, Mrs. Siddons met with unqualified success in a country where it had long been the right thing to pet players. Her Manager, Richard Daly, of Castle Daly, patentee of the Theatre Royal, Dublin, though no gentleman where pretty and poor young actresses were concerned, enjoyed the reputation of paying his company to a shilling; he was a man of family, and, but for a squint, very good-looking; on general grounds he appeared justifiably at his ease on the Mall in Sackville Street, where fashion congregated. He was well able to make the star and her husband acquainted with the right people.

Mrs. Siddons had a still better introduction from another source. The lady, who, as the Hon. Henrietta Boyle, with her stepfather, then Lord Bruce, had discovered the young actress at Cheltenham, and become gushingly intimate with her, now reappeared as the wife of John O'Neill, of Shanes Castle, on the Antrim shore of Lough Neagh, and to that historic house—destroyed in its then form (and including the private theatre Mr. O'Neill built) by fire, not long afterwards—Mrs. Siddons was cordially bidden on her second visit to Ireland, in 1784. Her record of her stay there is worth transcribing.

"The luxury of this establishment," she wrote, "almost inspired the recollection of an Arabian night's entertainment.

Six or eight carriages, with a numerous throng of lords and ladies on horseback, began the day by making excursions over this terrestrial paradise, returning home just in time to dress for dinner. The table was served with a profusion and elegance to which I have not seen anything comparable. The sideboards were decorated with adequate magnificence, on which appeared several immense silver flagons containing claret. A fine band of musicians played during the whole of the repast; they were stationed in the corridors, which led to a fine conservatory, where we plucked our dessert, from numerous trees, of the most exquisite fruits."

N. P. Willis, after a severe course of patrician claret and 'fruits,' could not 'pencil' more lusciously; Thackeray, burlesquing *Coningsby*, could scarcely outdo the silver flagons appearing on adequate magnificence. Since her term at Guy's Cliffe, 'like—but,' as far as her own prestige was concerned, 'oh, how different,' nothing to equal Shanes Castle in the way of an interior, had come into her experience, for Langford Court, the Whalleys' place, was not, of course, maintained in the style of a great country house.

In the O'Neills' party, Mrs. Siddons met and became interested (as who was not?) in one of the tragic Romantics of Irish history, one who was a traitor, or a martyr, or a divine fool, according to the point of view. "Poor Lord Edward Fitzgerald, the most amiable, honourable, though misguided youth I ever knew," commented Mrs. Siddons.

During the latter part of her second summer's Irish engagement, she stayed with Lord Edward's mother, the re-married Dowager Duchess of Leinster, and enjoyed the glory of driving in from Frescati, Black Rock, to Dublin for rehearsals. No wonder that the greenroom monster, jealousy, gnashed his teeth.

After his classic interview with her at his house in Bolt Court, Fleet Street, Dr. Johnson decided that the Mrs. Siddons of 1783 was unspoilt by the two powerful corrupters of mankind, praise and money. The discernment of the 'venerable Luminary' was better evinced in his general postulate than in his particular exception. It was shortly after her first visit to Ireland that rumours began to be heard of some slight

scath from 'praise,' and a certain impairment from 'money.' One fancies that the Grand Old Sentimentalist spoke while still under the soft memory of the lady's beauty, and his own felicity of compliment, when, apologising for Frank Barber's momentary inability to offer her a chair unencumbered by books, he said, "Madam, you who so often occasion a want of seats to other people, will the more easily excuse the want of one yourself."

It is told that our heroine was so inebriated with the incense burnt by Irish great ladies and the Lord Lieutenant (who was an English Duke) that she grew more than a little uppish towards any humbler people who ventured to approach with their small joss-sticks. One *conte*, palpably founded on a general impression, describes her stonily refusing sittings to Robert Home, then a Dublin portrait painter, on the plea that she hardly had time to sit to Reynolds, and then proceeding to box the man's ears (this detail is not *ben trovato*) because he riposted by saying he should be able to live without painting her. Another story describes poor 'Sid' telling the wife of a merchant who was entertaining him and Kemble at dinner, that, though he should like to further her wish to be introduced to Mrs. Siddons, he did 'not know how to break such a matter to her.' "This anecdote," artlessly adds the 'Theatrical Portrait' in the *European Magazine*, September, 1783, whence I glean it, "is not fabricated."

Owing, partly, to her rapid success and fashionable following, partly to her uncomplaisant character, Mrs. Siddons had, at this time, a considerable number of theatrical enemies, hissing detraction. "I have paid severely for my eminence," she said. The public need never have known much that was misrepresentation, and something, too, that, in her own behaviour, was regrettable, had it not been that hers was peculiarly a period in which newspaper editors went avidly scavenging for material suggested by malice. The most rancorous things ever printed concerning Mrs. Siddons are to be found in the theatrical paragraphs of the *European Magazine*.

She herself attributed the cloud of unpopularity that, more or less, hung over her during the latter half of 1784 to her Irish Manager, Daly, in the first instance. Daly was

admittedly, an inordinately vain man, and, in her Memoranda, bequeathed to Campbell, she says he could not forgive her for preventing him, in *King John*, from standing, as Faulconbridge, in the centre of the stage, during her 'best scene,' as Constance. In revenge, she states, he filled the Dublin press with railings at her well-known thrift, which his paragraphists called avarice. Gradually, these railings, stiffened out by modern instances of her meanness, 'found their way' into the London papers. So she accounted for the hostile demonstration which, as we shall see, greeted her on the opening night of her 1784-85 season at Drury Lane.

Since the causes of the passing and partial wave of odium that now overtook her were, in a special sense, personal, it is necessary to our study of her psychological life to

"Let this old woe step on the stage again."

The trouble was connected with two actors: Brereton, who, in 1784, again accompanied her to Ireland, and Digges, whom she found there. Brereton was a mediocre tragedian, or, at least, had only appeared mediocre till, during the winter of 1782-83, he was called upon to play Jaffier to her Belvidera, at Drury Lane, and (in the language of the day) 'derived a new soul from the collision,' at any rate, played, especially in the ardent third act, better than he had ever played before. Every one said that he, a married man, had fallen in hopeless love with Mrs. Siddons. Very possibly, it was so. The excellent Mrs. Siddons was the last person to be *attendrie* by any Mr. Brereton's susceptibility.

In the summer of 1784, at her desire, Brereton was re-engaged for Ireland, without salary, but on the understanding that his emolument was to be a benefit free of charges, with Mrs. Siddons acting in it. In the middle of the engagement, he fell ill, was "given over by his physicians," and could not play for her benefit. When he recovered, and talked of his, she refused to play for him entirely *gratis*, because he had not played for her. £50 per night for twenty consecutive nights was her pay from Daly, but at the various benefits she accepted £30. For Brereton, she now proposed to play for £20. Finally, partly in consequence of illness on her part, which sliced

almost a fortnight off the benefit end of her season, his benefit never took place. Since his mental health was already quivering—while in Dublin he attempted suicide; in 1785, became stark mad; and, in 1787, died in Hoxton Asylum—he, most likely, expressed over vehemently to his friends his disappointment about his benefit, and his friends, in all probability, retailed his indignation rather than the exact facts of his injury, whereby the statement got about that Mrs. Siddons had refused, on any consideration, to act for him. What a newspaper correspondent (supposed to be Kemble) who wrote over the signature of 'Laertes,' urged in defence of her apparent hardness merits consideration—

"Mr. Brereton and his wife have an ample salary at Drury Lane Theatre. They cannot receive less than *five hundred pounds* per annum. Mrs. Siddons performed for the benefit of Mr. Brereton only a few months before, by which he must have cleared nearly *two hundred pounds*. Could he be, therefore, an object of such necessity as to require a *gratis* performance?"

At about the same date (July, 1784), unfortunately for Mrs. Siddons, old West Digges, whose life had been none too reputable and none too prosperous, fell down, paralysed, whilst rehearsing with her in Dublin. As to what she did, or did not do, on this occasion, to assist a broken brother-actor, accounts materially vary. "It occurred to me that I might be of some use to him, if I could persuade the Manager to give him a night at the close of my engagement. I proposed my request to the Manager," is what she says. Her ill-wishers and the irresponsible accused her of first refusing to act, and, later, of demanding £50 if she acted, with an understanding that the fact of the fee was to be kept secret. Here, calumny stood confessed, for it was preposterous to allege she had asked Digges £20 more than she would have asked any actor in possession of a salary and good prospects.

In the following memoranda of Mrs. Siddons's own, we do not, I fear, catch a vision of Our Lady of Bounties, joyous in bestowal, and making little of her act of grace—

"By indefatigable labour, and in spite of cruel annoyances, Mr. Siddons and myself got together, from all the little country

theatres, as many as would enable us to attempt 'Venice Preserved.' Oh! to be sure it was a scene of disgust and confusion. I acted *Belvidera*, without having ever previously seen the face of one of the actors. Poor Mr. Digges was most materially benefited by this most ludicrous performance; and I put my disgust into my pocket, since money passed into his."

What had never been cordially conceded was grudgingly carried out, but, certainly, under adverse conditions. These, however, Mrs. Siddons appears to have brought upon herself by her delayed second thoughts, for when Digges's 'messenger,' who was, seemingly, Daly, originally applied to her, it is inconceivable that he proposed to have the benefit held over till after the company had moved to Limerick.

Unhappily, Mrs. Siddons had by no means heard the last of the charmless name of 'poor Mr. Digges.' When she returned to London, she found that evil report had been busy, and, by September 30th, felt it necessary to put forth, in Mr. Siddons's name, a newspaper letter, denying the truth of the accusations levelled at her, while laying the burden of actual disproof on Brereton, who, also, was in London, and on Digges. Three days later, Mr. Siddons was able to publish the following letter, addressed—in no very large-hearted style—to himself, from Brereton:—

"SIR,—I am concerned to find Mrs. Siddons has suffered in the public opinion on my account. I have told you before, and I again repeat it, that to the friends I have seen I have taken pains to exculpate her from the least unkindness to me in Dublin. I acknowledge she did agree to perform at my benefit for a less sum than for any other performer, but her illness prevented it; and that she would have played for me after that had not the night been appointed after she had played three times in the same week—and that the week after her illness—and I am very willing you shall publish this letter, if you think it will be of the least service to Mrs. Siddons, to whom I am proud to own many obligations of friendship. I am, Sir, your very humble servant,

"W. BRERETON"

This letter made the newspapers very active and foolish.



What follows—from the *General Advertiser*, October 7th, is a specimen of the sort of thing editors printed then :—

“QUERE, TO MR. BRERETON

“Did *you* or did Mr. Siddons write the letter signed *W. Brereton*? Answer this as you value your HONOUR; for much depends upon it. The public say Mr. Siddons *wrote*, and that you *scratched*, and then *signed*.—THEATRICUS.”

Perhaps Kemble or some other one of Mrs. Siddons's champions represented to Brereton that his letter read uncommonly cold. By October 5th he had been induced to address ‘The Printer of the *Public Advertiser*’ in another, equally fishlike. “Why,” inquires ‘Laertes,’ censuring what he calls Brereton’s “unexplicit first card” and “last summary card,” “did he not gratefully step forward by a *circumstantial letter*, as he was repeatedly called upon, previously to Mrs. Siddons’s arrival? . . . [His] expressions seemed extorted and inconclusive. The tongues of slander, in broken sentences, discovered mercenary motives only in their explication of *less sum*, though attempted to be veiled, they said, by Mr. Brereton’s delicacy. Whereas the transaction was veiled only by his obscure brevity.”

Tom King, Mrs. Siddons’s loyal friend, introduced a tentative and understood reference to ‘living worth,’ in the prologue with which, on September 30th, he opened the Drury Lane season, but the line was ill received by a portion of the audience. It must be conjectured that when Mrs. Siddons drove down from her newly leased house in Gower Street,<sup>1</sup> to the theatre, for her first performance, on October 5th (at ‘Half after Six,’ *The Gamester*, Mrs. Beverley, Mrs. Siddons) she was apprehensive of unpleasantness.

It came, as soon as she appeared, in the form of hisses<sup>2</sup> and a cry of ‘Off! Off!’ She waited; the clamour grew louder.

<sup>1</sup> “. . . the back of it is most effectually in the country, and delightfully pleasant”—Mrs. Siddons to Whalley. Whalley, i. 425. I am indebted to Mr. A. R. O. Stutfield, of the Bedford Office, for the facts that No. 14 (now 28) was the number of the house, and that William Siddons agreed to become assignee of the lease from 1786 until 1814.

<sup>2</sup> The *Morning Chronicle*, October 6th, said that an eighth of the audience hissed.

Two or three times she tried to speak, but vainly. At length—I quote from her own account, in the Campbell Memoranda, of this ordeal of an evening—

“A gentleman stood forth in the front of the pit, . . . who accosted me in these words: ‘For heaven’s sake, madam, do not degrade yourself by an apology, for there is nothing necessary to be said.’ I shall always look back with gratitude to this gallant man’s solitary advocacy of my cause: like ‘*Abdiel, faithful found; among the faithless, faithful only he.*’ His admonition was followed by reiterated clamour, when my dear brother appeared, and carried me away from this scene of insult. The instant I quitted it, I fainted in his arms; and, on my recovery, I was thankful that my persecutors had not the gratification of beholding this weakness. After I was tolerably restored to myself, I was induced, by the persuasions of my husband, my brother, and Mr. Sheridan, to present myself again before that audience by whom I had been so savagely treated, and before whom, but in consideration of my children, I would have never appeared again.”

Encouraged, no doubt, by the friendlier voices that had been calling her back, Mrs. Siddons came on alone, advanced to the centre of the footlights, and, gazing into the cavern full of eyes that fronted her, thus addressed the house:—

“Ladies and Gentlemen,—The kind and flattering partiality which I have uniformly experienced in this place would make the present interruption distressing to me indeed, were I in the slightest degree conscious of having deserved your censure. I feel no such consciousness. The stories which have been circulated against me are calumnies. When they shall be proved to be true my aspersers will be justified; but, till then, my respect for the public leads me to be confident that I shall be protected from unmerited insult.”

It was a dignified denial, and its speaker’s steadiness under fire created a revulsion of feeling. King came forward to entreat a few minutes for her to recover from what the *Public Advertiser* termed ‘her flurry,’ and, when the curtain presently rose on Mrs. Beverley, the house was hushed. “Mrs. Siddons, on Tuesday evening,” said the *Morning Chronicle*, “in a new and irksome situation indeed, displayed the most sincere

innocence, even by the peculiarity of her fortitude." It was her lifelong gift to shine brightest in adversity.

Up to October 22nd, in consequence of adverse winds delaying the Irish mails, Digges's solicited testimonial was still to seek. It then appeared, in the *Morning Chronicle*, as follows:—

"SIR,—I empower you to declare to the publick, that I did not pay Mrs. Siddons for playing for my benefit. I thanked the lady by letter for her politeness, which I am informed she has mislaid. I think it is but justice to inform you of this.

"WEST DIGGES

"To Mr. Woodfall"

This was even worse — certainly, more churlish — than Brereton's reserved exculpations. As regarded the unkindest cut in each allegation as to 'benefits forgot,' Mrs. Siddons had, clearly, been slandered; yet it was no great wonder that, in the face of such evidence to this as Brereton and Digges's letters, the average man caught up and conserved an *eidolon* he could name *stingy Siddons, the Lady Sarah Save-All*. When a public that lives on catchwords gets hold of catchwords as well adapted to its comprehension as these, it does not readily drop them, and so Mrs. Siddons, like Garrick before her, was, throughout her life, found guilty, by the gallery verdict, of an undue love of money. The average man resents thrift in a class he has been brought up to summarise, on the financial side, as light come, light go. It upsets his labels. Secretly, he would prefer to hold the nose of every 'bohemian,' to a grindstone, engraved, at first, 'open-handedness,' and, later, 'improvidence.'

'Laertes' may have been a special pleader, but he talked sense when he asked, "If a lady, perhaps, be prudent in making a future provision for herself and family—a theatrical phenomenon indeed!—must she sacrifice that prudence at the shrine of the imprudence of others?" It is almost needless to say that those members of Mrs. Siddons's own profession who were not addicted to 'muddling away money on tradesmen's bills' enthusiastically joined the hue and cry against her. They could not deny the statement made by Lee Lewes that,

at Cork, in 1783, she gave two benefits for charities, in addition to her *gratis* performances at Aickin's benefit and at Lewes's own. But they could make vague, oblique accusations—that she 'would as soon part with her eye teeth as with a guinea,' that she was the one parsimonious person at green-room collections for indigent actors, that at St Martin's Church, while the organ was playing out the congregation on a hospital Sunday, she lingered behind to evade the plate. Mrs. Abington's generosity to all fellow-players at their benefits was bepraised. It might have been retorted that Mrs. Siddons was an actress who had no sources of income less honourable than her art. In the *Public Advertiser*, for February 3rd, 1785, appeared a letter (attributed to 'Shakespeare' Steevens) in which Mrs. Siddons's 'rapture' of hospitality in the *Macbeth* banquet scene was sarcastically contrasted with her abstention from hospitality in Gower Street.

Not only journalists, but pamphleteers also, enormously worked up any depreciatory gossip of the *coulisses*. As late as 1786, for example, a tract appeared, entitled *The Green-Room Mirror*, with an article—the last of many on various players—on Mrs. Siddons, bearing, for motto, Rosalind's

"Who might be your mother,  
That you *insult*, exult, and all at once,  
Over the *wretched*?" etc. etc.

after which, the mouther proceeded to talk about "*Adversity* metamorphosed into *Affluence*, riding in the chariot of *Plenty*, hurling that identical *Charity* by which she was rendered an object of *notice* and *independence*, from the throne of pity to the eternal seat of despair"!

However much we may be admirers of Mrs. Siddons, it is impossible to consider that she came, in reality, altogether well out of either the Brereton or the Digges affair. Something may be allowed for misunderstanding, something for the malicious report of the envious, yet, taken all round, the evidence obliges us to see that she was, at best, only kind, in the Digges case, on an *arrière pensée*. It must frankly be stated that she never felt any spontaneous prompting to

take the children's—her children's—bread, and cast it to dogs of actors. The generosity towards brother-players in distress which is so winning a characteristic of the majority of successful players she did not possess. She had less *esprit de corps* even than the majority of wedded women. Her sense of responsibility was limited to the wants of her own nestlings. It was in keeping that, at a much later date (1815), she refused to play, except 'on her brother's terms'—*i.e.* half the receipts and a clear benefit—for the widow and orphans of her son Henry, who died while Manager of the Edinburgh Theatre. She was the crude mother of the animal world, and, like all organisms that conform to Nature's plan—

"Bounded by themselves, and unregardful  
In what state God's other works may be"—

she felt strong and satisfied, and lived her life untroubled by the prick of conscience.

Late in 1784, or early in 1785, Lord Hardwicke introduced to her a book of Greek history. She was studying a new part (*Desdemona*) which allowed her little time for independent reading, but when Lord Hardwicke asked her how she liked the book, she replied, in an unpublished letter among the recently acquired Hardwicke MSS in the British Museum—

"I think the memoirs of Pericles laid the strongest hold on me, this perhaps may be accounted for by my presumption having felt myself in some measure in his situation having been the favourite of the Mob one year—and the *next degraded* by them—it remains only—that I *may* like him be reinstated, when Malice is cold, and Candour takes its turn. Your Lordship does me honour in desiring *to be mentioned in my Memoirs* if the world shou'd ever be troubled with them it will reflect great honour on me to say I had the suffrage of so noble a Personage."

Mrs. Siddons sometimes spelt amiss, but she rarely, if ever, wrote shambling English. At all times, she was, if an increasingly procrastinating and infrequent, a fluent and able letter-writer, though, occasionally, her tendency towards plausibility, *le beau geste*, and even self-righteousness rather



MRS. SIDDONS  
BY GAINSBOROUGH



mars the impression of her which her letters would, otherwise, unfaillingly produce.

By one of life's unlucky concatenations, Dublin was, once more, in 1802, the scene of a reported niggardliness on Mrs. Siddons's part. Then, Frederic E. Jones, a man of property and position, who, at the time, magnificently managed the Theatre Royal, appears to have failed to carry into effect her assent—her cheerful assent, she afterwards called it—to his proposal that she should give her services in a performance for the benefit of the Lying-in Hospital. Wrongful report charged her with the whole fault of the omission of the performance, her popularity was again threatened, and, although the trustees of the hospital publicly contradicted the aspersion on her—'Mrs. Siddons had most certainly never refused to act for them, and indeed had never been requested to do so,' she thought it necessary to address to 'that tyrant Jones'<sup>1</sup> an open letter, explanatory of, at all events, her innocence of having been unready to assist 'so laudable an institution.'

Mrs. Siddons took Edinburgh by storm. She first went there for a nine nights' engagement,<sup>2</sup> in 1784, on her way to Dublin and Cork. "They treated me," she said of the Scotch, writing, on June 21st, to Whalley, "most nobly." She had cause to intensify the remark with each fresh visit she made. On one day, 2550 people applied for the 650 seats at the disposal of the Management, and the Church Synod had to arrange its meetings to suit her performances. Siddons fever ran so high, and a sense of the grotesque was so lacking, that, once, at a later date, 'the Athenians' encored her sleep-walking scene in *Macbeth*, till she was obliged to go through it again. At Edinburgh, in 1784, in nine nights, she cleared considerably over £900. She carried home, not only gold, but silver. The latter took the form, in 1784, of a hot-water urn ('an elegant tea-vase'), in 1788, of a 'massive' tea-tray, presented by the Faculty of Advocates, and inscribed 'To Mrs. Siddons As an Acknowledgment of Respect for Eminent Virtues,

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Galindo's letter to Mrs. Siddons, Appendix, 48, 1809.

<sup>2</sup> She actually acted ten nights, in the ordinary way, an eleventh for the benefit of 'the Charity Workhouse,' and a twelfth for her own benefit.



and of Gratitude for Pleasure Received From Unrivalled Talents.'

*Macbeth* and *Douglas*, the two national plays, were the pieces that best pleased Scots audiences. At *Douglas*, Caledonia clapped its hands and wings, and, once again, declared Home the Shakespeare, or something greater, of his country. Then, or earlier, Walpole might have walked in peril of his life had he murmured over the Border what, in his acid and lively way, he proclaimed at 'Twittenham'—that he knew no prose written by Home but his poetry. In England, only Mrs. Siddons's genius kept *Douglas* so long in the catalogue of acting plays.<sup>1</sup>

Boaden discovered that it was the civilising influence of the University that caused Mrs. Siddons to be so much admired in Edinburgh—"the neighbourhood of learning is always friendly to taste." Very likely, he was right. She was welcomed into Edinburgh's best society. On her first visit, she made the acquaintance of Hume, Blair, Home, Mackenzie, and Beattie. On later occasions, she met Henry Erskine, and was the guest of the Great Unknown.

When she began to act before a Scots audience she was chagrined by its impassivity. "Stupid people, stupid people!" she involuntarily murmured, on the stage. Afterwards, she used to amuse London friends by describing how, at last, as Belvidera, she nerved herself for one tremendous effort, as who should say, *Logs, if you cannot rise to that, I despair of you!* At the conclusion of the passage, and as she paused, exhausted, for breath, the comfortless silence was thawed by a voice saying, "That's no bad!" which opened the floodgates of laughter, and of loud and long applause. After this, Edinburgh audiences wallowed in responsiveness. Tears and groans rent the theatre, and gentlemen, as well as ladies, fell into fits. To the actress, these physical tributes were—in her top-window language—the 'public marks' of the 'gratifying suffrages' of her 'northern friends.'

<sup>1</sup> No better criticism of *Douglas* exists than is to be found in a letter, in Mr. J. H. Leigh's Collection, from Garrick to Lord Bute, July 10th, 1756, included in *Some Unpublished Letters of David Garrick*, Edited by George Pierce Baker, Boston, 1907.

With her first Edinburgh Manager, John Jackson, Mrs. Siddons's relations were less rosy. Her acting brought in big receipts, but so much of the stream poured solely into her pocket that, at the end of the engagement, Jackson, who was lessee as well as Manager, found he had made a bad speculation. After he had agreed to the star's original terms, 'a leading person in the Parliament House' started a £200 subscription, as to the destination of which Manager and actress disagreed, and, though Mr. and Mrs. Siddons insisted on an arrangement more favourable to themselves than the first proposed, on account of this assistance to the Manager, eventually the £200 subscription found its way into the Siddons bank balance, as a separate item.

In 1788, Mrs. Siddons again brought Jackson ill luck, though, this time, the fault lay solely with some turbulent limbs of the law who would not suffer the parts of Jaffier and Pierre, in *Venice Preserved*, to be cast according to Jackson's managerial judgment.<sup>1</sup> By 1790, Jackson was involved in difficulties, 'connected with his great expense in the engagement of the principal London performers.' From 1791 to 1800, Stephen Kemble leased the Theatre Royal. A good deal later, we shall find Mrs. Siddons acting there under the Management of her son, Henry, who became lessee in 1809, partly in consequence of his marriage with the actor-dramatist, Charles Murray's, daughter. Sir Walter Scott had been anxious to see Henry Siddons lessee and Manager. He knew the family interest would bring his friend, Kemble, as well as Kemble's diviner sister, oftener to Scotland. He purchased a share in the concern, and became one of the acting trustees for the general body of proprietors.

Mrs. Siddons was an indefatigable tourer. In August, 1795, she told Whalley she had travelled, on tour, that summer, nearly nine hundred miles. It was mentioned as a great feat that, in 1784, she acted in London, Bath, and Reading, within four days, and, in estimating her rarely remitted labours, the fatigue and discomforts of moving from place to place by stage coach are an element not to be overlooked.

<sup>1</sup> "Mrs. Siddons's performances were suspended for a whole week."—Genest, vii. 129.

"Here I am," she writes, in May, 1796, "sitting close in a little dark room, in a little wretched inn, in a little poking village called Newport Pagnell. I am on my way to Manchester, where I am to act for a fortnight; from whence I am to be whirled to Liverpool, there to do the same. From thence I skim away to York and Leeds."

Unbeautiful Leeds she called, by the way, the dirtiest, most disagreeable town 'in His Majesty's dominions, God bless him.' Most years she played two or three weeks' engagement round Wilkinson's Yorkshire circuit. She told Whalley that, six months before she reached York, all the boxes were taken. Wilkinson gave her the highest stage character:—

"She never heeds trouble—if truly indisposed, and possible to rise from her bed, she is certain in her duty to the public. She has not known until she arrived at York, what play she was first to appear in, or what characters she was to act during a course of six plays. If a dress has not arrived in time by the carriers, she sometimes has asked what was to play such a night; never saying such a play will do better than another, or such a part would be too fatiguing."

She played at Plymouth, Exeter, Bath, Birmingham; at Liverpool, at Manchester, at Glasgow, at Belfast.<sup>1</sup> Wide was her parish, and houses far asunder, but, everywhere, was Tom Tidler's ground, and, at home, there were five or six mouths looking up to be fed. Mrs. Siddons could make as much in two months on tour as in the entire winter (not counting her benefits) in London.

It was impossible that the star should always find herself well supported in country theatres. *A propos*, her daughter, Sally, æt. 23, wrote, on one occasion, from Cheltenham, to Sally Bird, regarding 'Callista,' "It destroys all my fine feelings when I see my Mother sigh and lament herself for the sake of such wretched creatures."<sup>2</sup> Another provincial trial Mrs. Siddons could not easily away with was the less cultivated, *i.e.* the less rapturous and prolonged applause. In

<sup>1</sup> In *John Halifax, Gentleman*, we see her, in her sedan, on her way to the theatre, in 'Coffee-house Yard, Coltham.'

<sup>2</sup> *An Artist's Love Story*, 50.

her own words, "A cold respectfulness chills and deadens an actress, and *throws her back upon herself*, whereas the warmth of approbation *confirms her in the character*, and she kindles with the enthusiasm she feels around." Could the whole situation of the player be more intelligibly put?

## IX

### HER INTERPRETATION OF SHAKESPEARE

**D**URING the theatrical season of 1782-83, Mrs. Siddons essayed no Shakespearean part. Why she was allowed to remain even so long out of the central current in the dramatic channel we have no means of knowing. The *European Magazine* for October, 1783, rashly suggested that her abstention was due to 'reasons which she either did not perceive, or would not dare to own.'

In fixing on her first Shakespearean character — impersonated, November 3rd, 1783, the opening night of her second season—she made a singular choice, which it would be hard to believe was not her own. Instead of plunging into the rich Italian love-making of Juliet, or identifying herself with Cordelia—with whom she would have been more in sympathy than with Juliet—she elected to become the heroine of the dark and painful comedy of *Measure for Measure*.

Shakespeare's Isabella is one of the very few women in drama who represent principle, not passion. *Measure for Measure* is a problem play. The problem is whether a sister will purchase her brother's life with her own dishonour. For a similar problem, with a dissimilar solution, Maeterlinck's *Monna Vanna* ought to be read side by side with *Measure for Measure*.

Isabella's grandly imaginative diction could not, in the flesh, have been Mrs. Siddons's, but, as regarded the rest of the character—the fierce chastity, the inexistence of one moment's hesitancy on the score that it is not her own life, but some one else's, she is sacrificing to her cloistral whiteness, the alacrity with which she accepts the repulsive substitution of

Mariana—Mrs. Siddons was the actress of all time best fitted to impersonate such a temperament.

No very direct criticism of her acting of Isabella is forthcoming. Boaden and Campbell both gave a general eulogium; the *European Magazine* spoke—on principle—slightingly of the performance; it seems clear that not even Mrs. Siddons, standing before the house in her serious beauty, first to plead for her brother, then to disown him, could make the rigidity of the part acceptable. Though it is true she acted it seven times in her final season, her Shakespeare's Isabella never attained the popularity of her Southerne's Isabella.

She was too intellectual an actress to be content to remain any longer outside the circle of those Campbell calls 'the great females of Shakespeare.' On December 10th, 1783, she appeared in the brief, but magnificent, part of Constance, in *King John*.

It is impossible to believe that, even in the case of the finest players, profound emotion, profoundly imagined, can spring out complete and full at a first performance. To the merely literary student, so great a character as Constance is enigmatic, by reason of its simplicity, and the self-consistency of it only rounds into view after repeated reading. The very fact that the part is traditionally remembered as one of Mrs. Siddons's highest achievements, while its original production was, in many quarters, adversely criticised, points to an impersonation that gained in maturity, force, and volume as time went on. The genesis of a great impersonation is as baffling to trace as the genesis of any other work of art, but, at least, we may be sure that no great impersonation sets solid at the first representation. Kemble expressively termed his early Wolsey 'raw,' and Mrs. Siddons 'used to pride herself,' says Campbell, on having improved in all her great characters. She told Mrs. Jameson that she had played Lady Macbeth during thirty years, and scarcely once, without carefully reading over her part, and, generally, the whole play, in the morning; and that she never read over the play without finding something new in it; "something," she said, "which had not struck me so much as it *ought* to have struck me." The player's accumulating experience of life is bound to ripen each one of

his, or her, interpretations of it. No sincere actor ever 'put a part to bed.'

The character of Constance deeply interested, and, at the same time, perplexed the thoughtful actress. She felt the difficulty of maintaining its cumulative wrath and desperation, in view of the calamities that cause these feelings being always developed when Constance is off the stage.

"Gone to be married! gone to swear a peace!"

and

"No, I defy all counsel, all redress"

are two as difficult entrances as are to be found in drama. As a means towards stimulating herself into Constance's continuously accelerated exasperation, Mrs. Siddons hit on a childlike device. She described it in those remarks on the character of Constance (they are rather—as was natural—memoranda on her acting of the part) which she gave Campbell for inclusion in his biography of her:—

"The quality of abstraction has always appeared to me so necessary in the art of acting, that . . . I wish my opinion were of sufficient weight to impress the importance of this power on the minds of all candidates for dramatic fame. . . . Whenever I was called upon to personate the character of *Constance*, I never, from the beginning of the play to the end of my part in it, once suffered my dressing-room door to be closed, in order that my attention might be constantly fixed on those distressing events which, by this means, I could plainly hear going on upon the stage, the terrible effects of which progress were to be represented by me. Moreover, I never omitted to place myself, with *Arthur* in my hand, to hear the march, when, upon the reconciliation of England and France, they enter the gates of Angiers to ratify the contract of marriage between the *Dauphin* and the *Lady Blanche*; because the sickening sounds of that march would usually cause the bitter tears of rage, disappointment, betrayed confidence, baffled ambition, and, above all, the agonizing feelings of maternal affection to gush into my eyes. In short, the spirit of the whole drama took possession of my mind and frame, by my attention being incessantly riveted to the passing scenes."

Though there was more in Mrs. Siddons's Constance than came of leaving a dressing-room door open, it is interesting to be let into the technical 'secret' of an artistic triumph. As we might know from the above extract, Mrs. Siddons was completely in accord with Sir Henry Irving as to the value of the process he called passing a character through the actor's own mind. She, in her more dictionary English, said, still writing of the part of Constance, the same thing:—

"If it ever were, or ever shall be, pourtrayed with its appropriate and solemn energy, it must be then, and then only, when the power I have so much insisted on [*i.e.* of 'abstraction'] co-operating also with a high degree of enthusiasm, shall have transfused the mind of the actress into the person and situation of the august and afflicted *Constance*."

Mrs. Siddons's playing of Constance was the highest thing she had yet grasped. Her mere bearing in the part was a piece of genius. Campbell, who could always speak well regarding anything he had actually seen, said of her Constance's 'vicissitudes of gesture' that they made you imagine her body thought. In other words, every muscle and nerve of her acted. At all times, she had that '*andar celeste*'—Romola Melema's way, that (as Northcote said of the walk of Italian women in general) 'affects you like seeing a whole procession.' We can fancy the eloquence of motion with which, as untameable Constance, she came down the *ensemble* between the recreant princes. We can fancy, too, the regal gesture with which, in the third act, she took the earth, as her niece, Fanny Kemble, says, 'not for a shelter, not for a grave, or for a resting-place, but for a throne.'

In her last scene, the anguish she threw into Constance's speeches about her 'pretty Arthur,' her 'gracious creature,' waxing, in captivity,

'as hollow as a ghost,  
As dim and meagre as an ague's fit,'

made a high-water mark in Shakespearean expression. These speeches, uttered by her, came less as the cries of a robbed lioness than as the agony of an imaginative woman, convinced, without certain knowledge, of her tender child's suffering death. The strong motherliness in Mrs. Siddons's nature helped to



make her Constance so real and great. Her acting, said Boaden, always seemed to need 'the inspiration of some duty,' and if for 'duty' we substitute 'family affection,' the comment becomes all the more just. Broadly speaking, Mrs. Siddons was best in parts that were most like herself.

Could the truth be ascertained, the key to the success of any actor in a special character would, in all probability, be found in certain complexional resemblances, independent of genius, between the two, which enable a ready and perfect identification to take place. Not that the man who plays a villain is a villain, but, deep in 'the buried temple,' an actor must possess some natural adaptability to certain rôles, and not to others.

Scott could only imagine Lady Macbeth 'with the form and features of Siddons,' and, even to the present day, what seen Lady Macbeth stands as vividly before the mind as the Siddons of tradition, laving her hands, in what Hazlitt ambiguously termed 'the night scene'? She first played the part in London on February 2nd, 1785, her benefit night. She was thirty—in the plenitude of her saliency and power. Yet, none the less, this was a supreme test, and some of the finest brains in England—Burke, Gibbon, Reynolds, Fox, and Windham—were present to estimate the performance.

It proved to be something to which the word 'performance' seems entirely inadequate. It was transfiguration, transubstantiation. The part appeared made for her by the same instinct which, in ancient times, combined poet and prophet in one.

The detractors who had persisted that she was only equal to Rowe's, Voltaire's, and Cumberland's showy shadows were put to silence. Reynolds's golden idea of identifying her with Melpomene was confirmed by all classes of the public. In this crucial essay, she definitively showed that her true field lay among the high actions and passions which make great drama a discipline in ethics.

We have followed her own account of the infiltration of the part into her imagination,<sup>1</sup> and, through Campbell, she bequeathed to the public a written summary of her reflections on Lady Macbeth's personality, reflections which, though not particularly subtle, and histrionic, in point of view, rather than

<sup>1</sup> P. 39.

critical, are extremely interesting, coming whence they do. It would not have been easy for Johnson to say of her what he said of Garrick—that he very much doubted if he ever examined one of Shakespeare's plays from the first scene to the last.

Lady Macbeth has been only less patient than Hamlet of divers interpretations. Mrs. Siddons imagined her a fragile blonde, and would have applied to her the lines she was fond of quoting from *Marmion*—

"It was a fearful sight to see  
Such high resolve and constancy,  
In form so soft and fair."

Two further new suggestions occur in Mrs. Siddons's remarks. She held that Lady Macbeth forecast and intended the murder of Banquo and his son as early as Macbeth himself, for the simple reason that when, as his first hint of it to her, Macbeth says—

"Thou know'st, that Banquo, and his Fleance lives,"

her reply is

"But in them nature's copy's not eterne."

Conformably to this, Mrs. Siddons believed that, at the banquet, Lady Macbeth, equally with her husband, saw Banquo's ghost, though with a scheming woman's self-control and a wife's nobler protectiveness of her husband's credit, she smothered, and denied, the fact.

In acting the part, the first great original touch Mrs. Siddons gave was her suspension of voice in "they made themselves—*air*," the second, her amazing burst of energy over "shalt be," in

"Glamis thou art, and Cawdor—and shalt be  
What thou art promis'd"

—an epitome of the play.

She became still more decisive and terrible in the succeeding scenes, each of which she made culminate in a line—

"O never  
Shall sun that morrow see!"  
"Give ME the daggers."  
"My hands are of your colour."

Her words were not mere words, but tremendous suggestions.

To Mrs. Jameson we owe the record of how, in Act I. 7, Mrs. Siddons adopted, successively, three different intonations in giving the words, "We fail." At first, it was a quick, contemptuous interrogation—"We fail?" Afterwards, with the note of exclamation, and an accent of indignant astonishment, she laid the principal emphasis on *we*—"We fail!" Lastly, she fixed on what, says Mrs. Jameson,

"I am convinced is the true reading—'We fail,' with the simple period, modulating her voice to a deep, low, resolute tone, which settled the issue at once, as though she said, 'If we fail, why, then we fail, and all is over.' . . . The effect was sublime."

At the solemn supper, where Mrs. Pritchard's acting was specially remembered, Mrs. Siddons was transcendent, whether in the derision by which she laboured to make Macbeth play the host, or in her royal courtesy in soothing, and, finally, dismissing the guests. The added burden of acting exacted by the responsibility of her theory, that Lady Macbeth, too, saw the spectre,<sup>1</sup> must have demanded the utmost imagination and judgment. It is worth knowing that when, after retirement, Mrs. Siddons used to read the play in public, the speeches she made most striking were those of Macbeth.<sup>2</sup>

A part of Professor George Joseph Bell's remarkable notes (dated 1809, extracted from 'three volumes, lettered "Siddons,"' and originally printed by permission of his son, Mr. John Bell, of the Calcutta Bar) on Mrs. Siddons's playing, in Edinburgh, of Lady Macbeth and other Shakespearean characters have come down to us, in two articles,<sup>3</sup> included in the posthumous *Papers, Literary, Scientific, etc.*, by Professor H. C. Fleeming Jenkin; and, by Mrs. Fleeming Jenkin's kindness, I am permitted to quote from them here. Professor Bell's are not alone the notes of a rarely keen spectator, but,

<sup>1</sup> In 1794, Kemble, on the authority of Robert Lloyd's '*The Actor*, banished the visible form of Banquo's ghost, but reinstated it on a general protest, and the ghost remained, till Irving unseated it. For an able discussion of Banquo's ghost, see *Les Théâtres Anglais*, par Georges Bourdon.

<sup>2</sup> *Diaries of a Lady of Quality* (Miss Wynn), edited by Abraham Hayward (2nd ed.), 104. 1864.

<sup>3</sup> Reprinted by permission of the Editors of the *Nineteenth Century* and *Macmillan's Magazine*.

as their editor remarked, 'written apparently on the spot, and during the red-hot glow of appreciation.' His method of record was to annotate, with compressed observations, a printed copy of the play. Dealing with *Macbeth*, his introductory sentence, "Of Lady Macbeth there is not a great deal in this play, but the wonderful genius of Mrs. Siddons makes it the whole," is a chapter in itself. In the banquet scene, at the dispersion of the guests, Professor Bell noted that she "Descends in great eagerness; voice almost choked with anxiety to prevent their questioning; alarm, hurry, rapid and convulsive as if afraid Macbeth should tell of the murder of Duncan." In support of his initial avouchment that a great player adds very much even to Shakespeare, Mr. Bell noted how the flagging of Lady Macbeth's spirit, 'the melancholy and dismal blank beginning to steal' upon her were more the creation of Mrs. Siddons than of Shakespeare. These manifestations commenced after the dismissal of the guests in her two lines,

"Almost at odds with morning, which is which,"

which she made 'Very sorrowful. Quite exhausted,' and

"You lack the season of all natures, sleep,"

which she made 'feeble now, and as if preparing for her last sickness and final doom.'

Naturally, and as we learn from all reporters, Mrs. Siddons reserved the profoundest impression of all for the sleep-walking scene. She has described her preparatory concentration, and how, when she sat in her Drury Lane dressing-room, striving to abstract herself from trivial surroundings, 'Sheridan came knocking, and would not be refused, because he wanted to tell her she would spoil everything if she insisted on setting down the candlestick, an action contrary to tradition and the custom of the deceased Mrs. Pritchard. But '*A bas la tradition!*' was as much the rule of Mrs. Siddons as of the other Madame Sarah, and so the candlestick was set down that she might the better (to use her own words) 'act over again the accumulated horrors of her whole conduct,' and the house was enraptured, and Sheridan converted. We know,

too, from her Memoranda, how she carried with her from the stage so overmastering an impression from her great scene that, to the astonishment of her dresser, she stood, unconsciously, before the glass, wringing her hands, and repeating

"Here's the smell of the blood still."

And what an imaginative miracle she must have made of that scene in which the once predominant queen is beheld wandering, through galleries of hallucinations, doomed, like her husband, to sleep no more! Mrs. Siddons's horror-struck eyes, her 'almost shroud-like clothing,'<sup>1</sup> her groaning whispers, her uncanny immobility, even in gesticulating and walking about, made the audience shudder. "Never moved, sir, never moved," said Stephen Kemble, at the Garrick Club, when asked what had been his sister's special 'note' in the scene. And yet there was a frightful energy in her way of rubbing at the damned spot, and it was to obtain this effect she set down the taper. Apparently, to judge from the following comments by the Rev. E. Mangin, she again took up the candle before her exit. He writes in *Piozziana* that he and Mrs. Piozzi

"once conversed much on the subject of the manner in which Mrs. Siddons sought for the taper . . . when Mrs. P. seemed to think her right; which, I confess, I did not. The great actress used, as it were, to *feel* for the light; that is, while stalking backwards, and keeping her eyes glaring on the house: whereas, I have somewhere read, or heard, that the somnambulist appears to look steadily at the object in contemplation, and, in fact, sees it distinctly. It never was my chance to encounter any one walking in sleep . . . but an ingenious friend of mine, and intimate with Mrs. Siddons, told me that *she* once did witness the fact; and if so, in all likelihood took her lesson for the splendid scene in question from nature."

In the sleep-walking scene, Professor Bell noted, she entered suddenly. He would have liked her to enter less suddenly. "A slower and more interrupted step more natural." "She advanced rapidly to the table, sets down the light and rubs her hand, making the action of lifting up water in one hand at

<sup>1</sup> Boaden.

*Macb.* There's one did laugh in his sleep, and one cry'd, "Murder!" That they did wake each other; I stood and heard them:

But they did say their prayers, and address'd them Again to sleep.

*Lady.* There are two lodg'd together.  
*Macb.* One cry'd, "God bless us;" and "Amen," the other;

As they had seen me, with these hangman's hands, Listening their fear. I could not say, amen, When they did say, God bless us.

*Lady.* Consider it not so deeply.  
*Macb.* But wherefore could not I pronounce, amen? I had most need of blessing, and amen

Stuck in my throat.  
*Lady.* These deeds must not be thought

After these ways; so, it will make us mad.  
*Macb.* Methought, I heard a voice cry, "Sleep no more!"

To all the house,—  
"Glamis hath murder'd sleep; and therefore Cawdor  
Shall sleep no more, Macbeth shall sleep no more!"

*Lady.* Who was it, that thus cry'd? Why, worthy thane, You do unbend your noble strength, to think

So brain-ack'd of things: Go, get some water, Wash this filthy witness from your hand.

Why did you bring these daggers from the place? They must lie there: Go, carry them; and fixer The sleepy grooms with blood.

*Macb.* I'll go no more:  
I am afraid to think what I have done;

Look on't again, I dare not.

*Lady.* Infirm of purpose! Give me the daggers: The sleeping, and the dead,

Are but as pictures: 'tis the eye of childhood, That fears a painted devil.—If he do bleed,

*X Mrs Siddons* her display her wonderful power & knowledge of nature. As if her imagination through spiritual assistance by the latter; him of his nature & being - her arms about her neck & her shuddering

*X* Her lower change to agony and alarm at his denunciation. another what to do - calling up the resources of her spirit

*X* The same man him - attempt to call back his wandering thoughts to ideas of common sense - strong emphasis on words - speaks firmly and his eyes looks within steadfastly - Why would I sleep - This remembrance - This felt to work on his mind

*X* how only at dinner to learn this dagger

*X* during the dagger very contemptuously

*X* As looking out she turns her face from stage and with the finger pointed to them with an angry expression says "If he do bleed"



intervals." Against her final 'Oh, oh, oh!' "this," he notes, "not a sigh. A convulsive shudder—very horrible. A tone of imbecility audible in the sigh."

John Wilson, in the character of the Ettrick Shepherd, gives the best collective impression of Mrs. Siddons in this greatest scene:—

"'Onwards she used to come . . . her gran' high straight-nosed face, whiter than ashes . . . no Sarah Siddons—but just Leddy Macbeth hersel—though through that melancholy masquerade o' passion, the spectator aye had a confused glimmerin' apprehension o' the great actress. . . . But, Lord safe us! that hollow, broken-hearted voice, "Out, damned spot." . . . It was a dreadfu' homily yon, sirs; and wha that saw't would ever ask whether tragedy or the stage was moral, purging the soul, as she did, wi' pity and wi' terror?'"

Mrs. Siddons died on June 8th, 1831, and, next day, Fanny Kemble decided to play Lady Macbeth at Covent Garden—"the Lady Macbeth will never be seen again."

Mrs. Siddons first played Desdemona on March 8th, 1785. It was the next part she undertook after her conquest of Lady Macbeth, and her plasticity—within the limits of tragedy—is symbolised by the observation some one made that, as 'the gentle lady married to the Moor,' she appeared less tall than in her previous incarnation. She was a deeply affecting, even a winning Desdemona, and, as a proof that she was not always on the high horse, it is worth noting that more than one critic dwelt on her 'familiar persuasiveness' in the earlier scenes, just as, in *Romeo and Juliet*, Boaden admired her 'artlessness' with Lady Capulet and the Nurse. Campbell writes:—

"I never wondered at her in any character so much as in *Desdemona*. . . . The first time I saw the great actress represent *Desdemona* was at Edinburgh, when I was a very young man. I had gone into the theatre without a play-bill. I knew not that she was in the place. I had never seen her before since I was a child of eight years old; and, though I ought to have recognised her from that circumstance, and from her picture, yet I was for sometime not aware that I was looking at the tragic Queen. But her exquisite gracefulness, and the emotions and plaudits of the house, ere long convinced me that she must



be some very great actress,—only the notion I had preconceived of her pride and majesty made me think that '*this soft, sweet creature, could not be the Siddons.*'"

Mrs. Siddons was well satisfied with her effect in the part. "You have no idea how the innocence and playful simplicity of Desdemona have laid hold on the hearts of the people," she wrote to the Whalleys. "I am very much flattered by this, as nobody ever has done anything with that character before."

'D. L. April 30 [1785] For bt. of Mrs. Siddons. As You Like It.'<sup>1</sup> In the earlier provincial period, Rosalind had been a favourite character of Mrs. Siddons's, but it did nothing for her now established fame; she blundered, indeed, in undertaking it. With the consciousness of great power and practice, performers in every art are too often led to think everything possible to their efforts. Rosalind's whimsical and pensive raillery is what Boaden calls sober comedy, and contains no touch of the farcical for which Mrs. Siddons would have been totally unfitted, that being 'not her nature,' but Rosalind's essential airiness, the *wohlgeboren* comedy element, was almost equally outside Mrs. Siddons's compass. Colman called her, in comedy, a frisking Gog, and the better-bred Charles Young, speaking particularly of her Rosalind, said—

"it wanted neither playfulness nor feminine softness; but it was totally without archness, not because she did not properly conceive it—but how could such a countenance be arch?"

Even so devout an admirer as the Rt. Hon. William Windham was relatively lukewarm as to Rosalind. On June 7th, 1786, he entered in his Diary—"Mrs. Siddons did 'Rosalind' much better than the first time, but . . . there is a want of hilarity in it; it is just, but not easy. The highest praise that can be given to her comedy is, that it is the perfection of art; but her tragedy is the perfection of nature."<sup>2</sup>

In 'assuming the male habit,' as Rosalind, she was too prudish for anything. Her beautiful stage figure was disguised by 'an ambiguous vestment that seemed neither male nor female,' and some one observed that she walked about as little

<sup>1</sup> Genest.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Fanny Burney on Mrs. Siddons's Rosalind, *Diary of Madame D'Arblay*, iv. 309, 1904-05.

as possible. With reference to a later 'page's' dress, she wrote characteristically to William Hamilton, as follows:—

"Mrs. Siddons would be extremely obliged to Mr. Hamilton, if he would be so good as to make her a slight sketch for a boy's dress, to conceal the person as much as possible."

The newspapers ridiculed the Rosalind 'vestment,' and fairly, for she played the part from choice, and it was her duty to dress it naturally. On all occasions, she was ultra-nice as to 'the limits' (to quote *Punch's* Frenchman) 'of her propriety.'

Though I have come upon no written notice of the part, I have seen a small print of "'Mrs. Siddons in Princess Katherine' King Henry V. Act v. Scene 2. 'Is it possible dat I should love the Enemy of France?' Burney del<sup>th</sup> Thorntwaite Sculp. Printed for J. Bell. British Library, Strand, London, Dec. 6th 1785." In many an outrageously bad portrait, engraved for the *Lady's Magazine*, the *European Magazine*, etc., Mrs. Siddons, in one or another well-known tragedy part, is recognisable alone by the ultra-long nose assigned her.

She first played Portia, after 1782, in London, at John Kemble's benefit, Drury Lane, April 6th, 1786. In 1788, she named Portia to Walpole (with whom she was then beginning to be on visiting terms) as the stock part in which she most wished him to see her. Perhaps she wished to wipe out ancient records of her failure in *The Merchant of Venice*, perhaps she judged that her interlocutor had a comedy taste. But Horace, who did not care for the play, and was clear that Mrs. Siddons's warmest devotees did 'not hold her above a *demigoddess* in comedy,' expressed a stronger desire to see her as Athenais, in Nathaniel Lee's *Theodosius*. "Her scorn," he said, "is admirable."

It is worth contrasting the view universally taken of her unfitness for *The Merchant of Venice*, in her immaturity, in 1775, with what Shelley's second father-in-law had to say about her acting, in her prime, of the scenes in the play we should least associate with Siddons genius. Naturally, to worship the risen sun is easier than to discern streaks of dawn. Of the way in which, in Act v., she chaffed Bassanio as to the missing ring, Godwin wrote:—

"There was something inexpressibly delightful in beholding

a woman of her general majesty condescend for once to become sportive. There was a marvellous grace in her mode of doing this; and her demure and queen-like smile, when, appearing to be most in earnest, she was really most in jest, gave her a loveliness, that it would be in vain for me to endeavour to find words to express."

Though she never played Beatrice, in *Much Ado about Nothing*, in London, she had played the part, in 1779, in Bath, and, in August, 1795, Miss Seward wrote to Whalley, after seeing her go through some of her Shakespearean parts in Birmingham, "O, Mr. Whalley, what an enchanting Beatrice she is!"

As Ophelia (May 15th, 1786), which Mrs. Siddons performed once only, there could be no danger of her knowing only her own 'lengths'—as was said of Mrs. Pritchard's Lady Macbeth, for, as we have seen, she had long ago performed the tragedy's title-rôle, never re-acted by her in London. She, also, sometimes played—not, in London, till April 29th, 1796—its premier female part, the Queen. We read, and can believe, that as piteous Ophelia she was no mere dishevelled ballad-singer, but made the utmost of the character, and gave peculiar tragic power to the 'rue for you' addressed to Queen Gertrude. Earlier in the scene, her look and gesture so electrified the Queen, when she seized her arm, that the startled lady, Mrs. Hopkins, old stager though she was, forgot her words. Players, as we saw in the case of Holman and the elder Macready, remain, in spite of inurement, impressible creatures.

Ophelia being a short part, Mrs. Siddons reappeared before her supporters on the same evening as the Lady, in Dalton and Colman's arrangement of *Comus*. Crabb Robinson found that 'she spoke in too tragic a tone for the situation and character.' It was the only time in his life he saw her without pleasure. Even she could make of a part so undramatic nothing more than a recitation, so far comparable to Collins's *Ode on the Passions*, which she gave after *King Henry the Eighth*, on March 26th, 1792, and Robert Merry's *Britannia's Ode*, which she several times recited, on George III's restoration to sanity in 1789, dressed as Britannia, and seating herself, at the close, in the attitude of 'La Belle Stuart' on the penny.

Turning to Boaden for his notice of Imogen, first essayed by Mrs. Siddons for her earlier benefit in 1787 (January 29th), we find him heavily rapturous. It is doubtful, all the same, whether she made the part *saisissant*. Imogen is handicapped by her story, for, without venturing so far as to term *Cymbeline*—but for Imogen—one of Shakespeare's failures, it may be permitted to call to mind that Matthew Arnold styled it (in conversation) 'an odd, broken-backed sort of a thing.'

It might have been expected that Shakespeare's great filial part, Cordelia, a character more hallowed, and more human, than Isabella, would have appealed both to Mrs. Siddons's taste and genius. Campbell, however, relates that she spoke of it to him as 'a secondary part,' and said she should not have played it but for strengthening her brother's Lear. It is to be feared that even Mrs. Siddons estimated a part largely by the number of its entrances. I can find no adequate notices of her Cordelia. She first played it for her benefit of January 21st, 1788. The part had never been popular with eighteenth-century people. They held it 'a character of no great power.' Mrs. Siddons's Cordelia, it should be remembered, was the degenerate princess of Nahum Tate (of Messrs. Tate and Brady, Dry Psalters).

Descending to a lower platform, Mrs. Siddons acted, at Kemble's benefit, on March 13th, 1788, Katharine, in Garrick's condensation of *The Taming of the Shrew*, but she made little impression as the too easily subdued termagant. Of what great impression is the part, indeed, capable?

For her own benefit, May 5th, 1788, *All for Love*, Dryden's noble imitation of *Antony and Cleopatra*, was revived, with Mrs. Siddons as the heroine Byron calls 'coquettish to the last, as well with the asp as with Antony.' Once or twice, Kemble asked her to play Shakespeare's Cleopatra, but, for what Genest thought 'a very foolish reason,' she always declined. Her reason was, at least, a characteristic one, viz., that she should hate herself if she should play the part as it ought to be played.

When Johnson, in his historic interview with her, asked her 'which of Shakespeare's characters she was most pleased with,' she answered that 'she thought the character of Catherine

in Henry the Eighth the most natural,' and the Sage coincided. With her assumption of Shakespeare's last-written female part, on November 25th, 1788, we first feel conscious of her increasing suitability for forceful and magnanimous, in contradistinction to tender and dependent, characters. Physical, as well as mental, maturity is becoming, indeed, necessary to Queen Katharine, who was nearly fifty, as much as to Volumnia, the mother of a man. Yet, taking Mrs. Siddons's Shakespearean parts chronologically, it will be observed that she played these two before her first appearance, in London, as Juliet.

Her embodiment of Queen Katharine was no less superb than her moral rendering of the character. Much of her awe and majesty, something of her fire, are preserved in George Henry Harlow's velvety piece of painting, *The Court for the trial of Queen Katharine*, and Genest says that a person who had never seen Mrs. Siddons would form, from this portrait, a better idea of her figure, face, and manner than from any description.

We may compare with what Campbell and every other competent reporter had to say of the enlightenment she shed on Shakespeare Erskine's *experto crede* pronouncement that her speeches were a school for orators. In Act I. of *King Henry the Eighth*, where the examination of Buckingham's surveyor takes place, nothing finer was ever seen on the stage than her judge-like solemnity when she interrupted Wolsey's instrument in his schooled charge against Buckingham.

"Take good heed  
You charge not in your spleen a noble person,  
And spoil your nobler soul! I say, take heed"——

Since the Portia of her immaturity, she had never had such an opportunity for what our forefathers called level declamation as in Katharine's Trial. Here she originated a magnificent piece of business in distinguishing, by her gesture, pause, and emphasis, between Campeius and Wolsey—

*Campeius*.—"It's fit . . . their arguments  
Be now produc'd and heard.  
*Q. Kath.*— Lord cardinal,—  
To you I speak.  
*Wol.*— Your pleasure, madam?"



““ Lord cardinal,—  
To YOU I speak !”



When the legate rises, noted Professor Bell—

"... she turns from him impatiently; then makes a sweet bow of apology, but dignified. Then to Wolsey, turned and looking *from* him, with her hand pointing back to him, in a voice of thunder, 'to *you* I speak.' This too loud perhaps; you must recollect her insulted dignity and impatience of spirit before fully sympathising with it."

The scene where the two churchmen find the Queen among her ladies gave scope for all Mrs. Siddons's intellectuality in acting. Out of her realisation of the just-minded, long-enduring Queen's penetration in seeing the snare the Cardinals had laid, she reconstructed one of the most bracing of Shakespeare's scenes, in all its poignancy.

The following description, quoted by Campbell, of Katharine's death-scene is from the pen of James Ballantyne. We find from it that, here, again, Mrs. Siddons became the uncompromising realist she was wont to be in scenes of gradual death:—

"... Through her feeble frame and the death-stricken expression of her features, she displayed that morbid fretfulness of look, that restless desire of changing place and position, which frequently attends death. She sought relief from the irritability of illness by often shifting her situation in her chair; having the pillows against which she was propped every now and then removed and re-adjusted; bending forward and sustaining herself, while speaking, by the pressure of her hands upon her knees; and playing amongst her drapery with restless and uneasy fingers."<sup>1</sup>

Another character in which Mrs. Siddons collaborated with Shakespeare was Volumnia in *Coriolanus*. She first played the part on February 7th, 1789, and it at once became one of her finest. Twenty-two years later, when she was playing it—still, to her brother's famous *Coriolanus*

<sup>1</sup> Campbell, ii. 149-50. I have, to my regret, been unable to trace an existent copy of the book quoted, viz., *Dramatic Characters of Mrs. Siddons*, Edinburgh, 1812. It consisted of criticisms, most of which had appeared in Ballantyne's the *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, and were here reprinted, 'by the express wish of Mrs. Siddons.' Ballantyne (not D. Terry, as Campbell thought) himself wrote the *Courant's* dramatic criticism, and was referred to by the Shepherd, in 'Noctes, No. 32, as 'the best theatrical creetic in Embro.'



—in her farewell performances at Covent Garden, Lawrence wrote to Joseph Farington, R.A., "The Town is fashionably and I had almost said rationally mad after it."<sup>1</sup>

An actress whose physique had become unfit for youthful parts might naturally decline on Volumnia, but this was not the case with Mrs. Siddons, for she made her first triumph in the part at thirty-three, when, complains Genest, her dissidence from Woffington's self-denying practice of aging her face made her appear Coriolanus's *sister*.

The very name, 'Volumnia,' seems to express Mrs. Siddons. She was the one actress who can ever have approached in outward resemblance to a correspondence with the august image used by Coriolanus—

"My mother bows;  
As if Olympus to a molehill should  
In supplication nod."

Her noble form, with what Hazlitt called its 'decided, sweeping majesty,' seemed the natural mould for the magnitude and elevation of the sentiments Volumnia utters. She did not need, like Harvard, to study her attitudes between six looking-glasses, it was enough to feel the passion, and, because she was a sublime actress, the action followed. Her Roman matron was herself, and thus she would have desired to act had the play been reality.

The best description ever given of an isolated piece of acting relates to her Volumnia, and, since 'there's none cares, like a fellow of the craft,' it proceeds, as we might expect, from an actor. Julian Young recalled, as follows, Charles Young's impression of her exultant pantomime, in Act II, when her son returns to Rome 'Coriolanus':—

"... instead of dropping each foot, at equi-distance . . . in cadence subservient to the orchestra . . . with head erect, and hands pressed firmly to her bosom, as if to repress by manual force its triumphant swellings, she towered above all around her, and almost reeled across the stage; her very soul, as it were, dilating and rioting in its exultation, until her action lost all grace, and, yet, became so true to nature,

<sup>1</sup> *Sir Thomas Lawrence's Letter-Bag*, 86.

so picturesque, and so descriptive, that, pit and gallery sprang to their feet, electrified by the transcendent execution of the conception."

Juliet, on our stage, like Phèdre in France, is traditionally regarded as the touchstone of an actress's tragic powers, and yet how rarely has an actress established her fame by her Juliet! There was no general enthusiasm over the part when Mrs. Siddons first assumed it for her benefit night, May 11th, 1789, and she never repeated it. Leigh Hunt found that she was too stately and self-subdued for 'the amatory pathetic.' Any ascendancy over her of a mother or a cackling nurse seemed preposterous, and the thoughtful strength of her features alone contradicted a passion 'too rash, too unadvis'd, too sudden.' Compared with Shakespeare's, her vision of love was middle-aged, it was in tune with a sublimated version of 'John Anderson, my Jo, John.' Her faithful knight, Boaden, tried to champion her by depreciating Juliet, whose ardency he called "entirely without dignity: it springs up, like the mushroom, in a night, and its flavour is earthy."

As, during the tragedy's progress, the serious interest of risk and calamity deepened, Mrs. Siddons responded to its call. In her forecast of the horrors awaiting her in the Capulet monument, she was, at last, and then only, truly herself—vivid, terrific, and original.

One of the minor Shakespearean queens, Elizabeth, widow of Edward IV, was originally performed by her, on February 7th, 1792, to her brother's Richard III, but there was little to be made out of the character. She could have done more with her early part, Lady Anne, or with Queen Margaret.

It is interesting to know that Hermione, first played on March 25th, 1802, a decade before her retirement, was the last of her new characters, whether in or out of Shakespeare. In 1785, she had written to Whalley, "I am going to undertake your adored Hermione this winter. You know I was always afraid of her . . ." but the Hermione spoken of was, most probably, Hermione in Philips's *Distressed Mother*, which she played for her benefit, March 4th, 1786.

As for the greater Hermione, she could not have made a

better choice for her waning maturity, in 1802, than this wife and mother part, and she was nobly imaginative in it. As Boaden rightly says, it would be absurd to suppose that characters like Belvidera and Southerne's Isabella proved as delightful to audiences in Mrs. Siddons's autumn as they had been in her April, but her Constance, Lady Macbeth, Hermione, and Volumnia were no less beautiful and compelling in her final season than when first she impersonated them. In her artistic career there was no solution of continuity; only, her favourite range of characters gradually settled among women imagined by Shakespeare as *nel mezzo del cammin*.

To think of the incalculable extension of Shakespeare's influence due to Mrs. Siddons is to be reminded of the pretty lines M. Rostand recited to her dramatic namesake on December 9th, 1896—

"Tu sais bien, Sarah, que quelquefois  
Tu sens furtivement se poser, quand tu joues,  
Les lèvres de Shakespeare aux bagues de tes doigts."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Tennyson, *To W. C. Macready*, 1851—

"Our Shakespeare's bland and universal eye  
Dwells pleased, through twice a hundred years, on thee."

## JOHN PHILIP KEMBLE

LITTLE is seen of Roger Kemble after the emergence of Mrs. Siddons and John. A few glimpses given by Boaden indicate that the patriarch did not lack what Mr. H. B. Irving (writing in the *Fortnightly Review*, August 1906) aptly termed the 'rather Crummles-like solemnity' of the entire family. In 1788, 'Kemble Senior' played, 'very well,' in *The Miller of Mansfield* at the Haymarket, at the benefit of his daughter-in-law, Mrs. Stephen Kemble. He was sixty-seven, and it was his metropolitan début, so advertised. The fact that the old man received a cheque for £19, 5s., signed by Richard Peake, the Drury Lane treasurer, on 'N' account, and Genest's report of a banker's refusing him, during the winter of 1786, a share in some beneficent fund lodged in his hands, on the ground that 'he could not consider the father of Mrs. Siddons, who was making so much money, as a fit object of charity,' do not, necessarily, prove neglect on the part of Roger's wealthier children. York Herald contributes the fact that, "in 1792, Arms, with the crest of a Boar's head between a branch of laurel and one of palm was granted to Roger Kemble of Kentish Town" (cf. R. K.'s designation in pedigree, p. 5). During his last years, Roger appears to have lived with the John Kembles, at 89 Great Russell Street, and from there he was buried. At the time of his death, John was holidaying in Madrid, whence he wrote to Charles:—

"Nothing in my opinion could be better judged than your interring my poor father without the least affectation of any parade, and I agree with you entirely, that his remains should be protected by a simple stone; but I beg that in

the plain memorial inscribed on it his age may be mentioned. Long life implies virtuous habits, and they are real honours."

Creditable platitudes came naturally to every member of the House of Kemble. With more nature, the traveller had written, on the previous day :—

"How in vain have I delighted myself in thousands of inconvenient occurrences on this journey, with the thought of contemplating my father's cautious incredulity while I related them to him!"

As we have already found, John Kemble by no means sprang into his position of being the 'top-tragedian' of the day without a stern probationary period. But, beyond and 'back of' the gentleman's education he had received at Sedgely Park and the Douai College, the young actor possessed ambition, ability, and will. On September 30th, 1783, he made his début, as Hamlet, at Drury Lane, thanks to Mrs. Siddons's influence, and we read that, on his appearing, every one murmured, 'How very like his sister!' To realise the strong resemblance, we have but to turn to Lawrence's portrait of him, as Hamlet, in his fur and feathers, ruminatory, handling Yorick's skull, and poised (as a child might think) on the top of a globe, like Moses on Pisgah. Kemble's height and size, said Scott, reviewing Boaden's *Life of Kemble*, were "on a scale suited for the stage, and almost too large for a private apartment." The *English Theatre*, on the other hand, describing his early performances, found—in the quaint style of the period—that "he wants that fullness of chest and abdomen which gives a finished appearance."

Still, as in Henderson's time, 'Gentleman Smith' was in possession of the best tragedy parts at Drury Lane, and more than two months elapsed before Kemble and Mrs. Siddons—in obedience to the King and Queen's desire—were seen together in parts of equal consequence. Smith's retirement in 1788, synchronising with Kemble's elevation to the stage management, cleared the field, and, thenceforth, Kemble almost invariably supported his sister.

It might have been imagined that she would find it insipid and difficult to act with such a near relation, and

one inclines to think that the brother and sister, and, what is commoner, the husband and wife combination produces, in the audience, some diminution of illusion, a suggestion corroborated by the fact that few married couples appear on programmes under one surname. Fanny Kemble, who constantly acted in tragedies with Charles Kemble, found the personal relation a painful element, the sight of his anguish or displeasure invariably bringing him before her as her father, and not in the part he was playing. But the greatest member of the family so forgot everyday life in her part that she was absolutely unhampered, and, during her earlier and middle years at Drury Lane, she could not have found another tragic actor as competent as John.

The members of clan Kemble—who were ever seeking to turn their theatre, whether Drury Lane or Covent Garden, into a family concern—rarely permitted themselves the luxury of home criticism. Once, however, Mrs. Siddons (in 1805) wrote of John's stage lovemaking as outsiders spoke of it:—

"I do not like to play Belvidera to John's Jaffier so well as I shall when Charles has the part: John is too cold—too formal, and does not seem to put himself into the character: his sensibilities are not as acute as they ought to be for the part of a lover: Charles, in other characters far inferior to John, will play better in Jaffier—I mean to my liking. We have rehearsed it."

Her determined alternative, not of Cooke, nor Johnston, nor Brunton, but 'Charles,' reminds one, in its spirit, of Stevenson's Brothers of Cauldstaneslap. They haed a gude pride o' themsel's, and the Kembles were like them. Mrs. Inchbald somewhere animadverts on the 'too conscious elevation' of the whole Kemble group.

John Kemble's speciality lay in all that was eloquent and grandiloquent in tragedy. He was a fine actor, not a great actor, less 'born' than his sister, more 'made.' In 1783, before he played Hamlet, he copied out the part forty times; like Mrs. Siddons, he wrote an analysis of the character of Macbeth—*Macbeth Reconsidered* (1786; enlarged, in 1817, into *Macbeth and King Richard the Third*); if ever he felt he had played beneath his powers, he would say, disgustedly, "I acted to-

night THIRTY SHILLINGS a week." By reason of his own stately cast of mind, he made a superb Roman, and, though both Leigh Hunt and Hazlitt thought Penruddock in Cumberland's *The Wheel of Fortune* his best impersonation, general tradition sides with Macready in associating him most closely with the high-reared class pride of Coriolanus. His strength (like Zola's in fiction) lay in working out a character in the grip of a fixed idea. Then, he would elaborate the author's meaning, leaving nothing to chance, nothing to the inspiration of the moment, till, sometimes, the intensity of the grapple set his imagination aglow, and he created a part as convincingly alive as Washington Irving says his Zanga was, in Young's *Revenge*. "He gave," said Hazlitt, "the deepest interest to the uninterrupted progress of individual feeling." "He is great," said Scott, "in those parts where character is tinged by some acquired and systematic habit, like stoicism or misanthropy."

To a typical extent, he was a classic, as opposed to an impressionist, actor. Forgetting Garrick, he reverted to Quin's methods, exactly as, forgetting him, Kean was to revert to Garrick's. Kemble thought out the flexure of every finger. In his earnestness, he was humble enough to inquire searchingly of Mrs. Inchbald how Henderson had played Sir Giles Overreach in Massinger's *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*. "... I shall be uneasy if I have not an idea of his dress, even to the shape of his buckles, and what rings he wears on his hands."

Except at rare intervals, Kemble lacked power to let himself go. Too often, people could smell the machine oil. In consequence of too great solicitude, his acting sometimes failed to produce the effect intended; "for very love of self himself he slew," as, when, in playing Coriolanus, he overlaboured the superciliousness and nonchalance till Hazlitt was reminded of the unaccountably abstracted air, contracted eyebrows, and suspended chin of a person about to sneeze.

Combined with perfect enunciation, the 'weighty sense,' which, says Lamb, Kemble put into every line was in itself an attraction to the judicious, while it gave the unskilful a vague conviction of personal dignity in the actor. Kemble

showed that he believed in things poetic and ideal, and he induced audiences to partake his faith and taste. He may possibly have owed some of his solemnity of manner to his priestly training, but his aims were high, and, as an actor-manager, he, too, with Garrick and Macready, honestly merited Tennyson's tribute to the three, that they

"made a nation purer through their art."

Actors, as stage history so often reminds us, are ignorant of their weak side. Kemble had a strong inclination to play Charles Surface. He only gave Sheridan the opportunity to tell him, after he had done so, that he had 'entirely *executed* his design.' A player in whose acting there was, according to Hazlitt, 'neither variableness nor shadow of turning,' whose pauses Sheridan recommended should be filled up with music, was not likely to excel in light comedy, and we may well believe his friend, John Taylor's, statement—

"Whene'er he tries the airy and the gay,  
Judgment, not genius, marks the cold essay."

In Kemble's opinion, knowledge and study, if only profound enough, qualified their possessor equally for comedy and tragedy. Sir Walter Scott, in a letter to Mrs. Maclean Clephane, best summed up, for and against, the art of his friend, 'King John,' as he sometimes called him, or (quoting his own Claud Halcro) 'glorious John.' "He is," wrote Scott, "a lordly vessel, goodly and magnificent, when going large before the wind, but wanting the facility to go 'ready about.'"

If Kemble had not been an actor, he might have become a more prominent philologist than his nephew and namesake, Charles's elder son. He overlaid several Shakespearean passages with ingenious 'readings,' regarding the rightness of which, however fantastic, he remained inflexible. He had a liking for christening characters to whom Shakespeare and other dramatists had given no individual names. He was born for those textual niceties which, as a rule, are unprofitable on the stage because they tend to subordinate the whole to a part. Commercially unprofitable one, at least, of



his pedantries was not. This was the archaistic pronunciation of 'aches' as 'aitches' in *The Tempest*—

"Fill all thy bones with aches"—

for a zealous public was, Genest states, so *intrigued* by the innovation that the piece lived several nights longer than Thomas Harris, then patentee of Covent Garden, had anticipated, and caused Cooke, who, one night, played Prospero, to draw as well as Kemble, because people wanted to hear how he would manage the critical lines. He left them out.

Mrs. Siddons's son Henry's daughter, Mrs. Mair, states, in *Recollections of the Past*, that Kemble would never allow the Henry Siddons children to say 'funny.'<sup>1</sup> "A wrong word, or one wrongly pronounced, affected him as a wrong note in music affects a musician." Every one recollects the story, included in Coleridge's *Table Talk*, of how Kemble was discoursing in his measured manner after dinner at Lord Guildford's, when the servant announced his carriage :—

"He nodded, and went on. The announcement took place twice afterwards; Kemble each time nodding his head a little more impatiently, but still going on. At last, and for the fourth time, the servant entered, and said, 'Mrs. Kemble says, sir, she has the rheumatise, and cannot stay.' 'Add *ism*!' dropped John, in a parenthesis, and proceeded quietly in his harangue."

A list of his linguistic affectations is given in the appendix to Leigh Hunt's *Essays on the Performers of the London Theatres*. He called 'fastidious,' 'fastijjus,' and 'Aufidius,' 'Aufijjus.' He said 'To air is human.' With him, 'pierces' became 'purses,' 'virtue' and 'merchant,' 'varchue' and 'marchant.' How he justified some of the pronunciations he insisted on passes understanding. His 'Room' and 'goold,' however, were no more than the pronunciation traditional, up till comparatively recently, in many old English families. So did Landor pronounce 'Rome' and 'gold.'

In October, 1788, Kemble succeeded Tom King as

<sup>1</sup> John Kemble had no children. *A propos*, Emery thus criticised his acting: "He has no natur; not a bit. But then he never wur the feyther of a child, and that accounts for it."

Drury Lane's Manager, under Sheridan and his co-proprietors. Sheridan's co-proprietors were sleeping partners, and their combined interest only amounted to half the total. King retired in disgust. He had never been given a free hand, even so far as to order 'a yard of copper lace' on a costume. Kemble entered upon his new office with enthusiasm. As yet, he did not know his Sheridan.

While credit permitted, he seems to have been empowered to run the theatre according to his views. In what would nowadays be thought a palæolithic way, he liked to see classics picturesquely mounted, and, when he played Brutus or Coriolanus, he even aimed—in spite of skimpy togas—at something doing duty for an 'archæological revival.' He was, however gropingly, the forerunner of Charles Kean, and first of the moderns.

Garrick's Drury, architecturally condemned, was pulled down in 1791, and Sheridan's new theatre, double the size, capable of holding 3611 people, vast, impracticable, unfinished, was opened in 1794. Shortly after, Mrs. Siddons described the new building—Henry Holland's—as 'a wilderness of a place.' She was finding it necessary to magnify and underline gestures, voice, and facial expression to suit it. Before the closing of the earlier house, Kemble presented *The Tempest*, with, according to contemporary notions, 'extraordinary magnificence.'

Among serious critics there was much head-shaking over Kemble's zeal for

"those gilt gauds men-children swarm to see."

Boaden says the actors, as a matter of course, foresaw that spectacular staging would subordinate the importance and prestige of acting. One wonders what they would have said in a day when Shakespeare is deemed scarcely presentable unless helped out with lurid sunsets, classic architecture, running waterfalls, horses, a donkey, or a wolf-hound, when in vain Mr. Gordon Craig seeks to persuade a coarsened public that the thing needful is not scenery, but a scene, suggestive, undiverting, designed, not to 'give reality'—for theatrical illusion can only be established through

feeling—but to spare long passages of description. If we could see Mrs. Siddons acting in a bare hall, who can suppose but that, in three minutes, we should be heedless of the absence of 'scenery'? Boaden unhesitatingly states—to moderns the remark must seem the acme of quaintness—that Kemble and his sister never proved themselves such transcendent actors as when they made good their ascendancy over "accompaniments that would have rendered feebler merits contemptible."

The Sheridan-Kemble-Siddons constellation may have been, as was said, 'the greatest variety of talent ever seen combined into one dramatic company,' but, like Lord Grenville's *All the Talents*, it did not contain the elements of permanence. In 1796, sickened with Sheridan's non-payments and evasions, and the consequent exasperation and disorder behind the curtain, Kemble threw up his Managership, and was succeeded in it by Wroughton, who, in 1798, on his intended retirement from the stage, gave place to James Aickin. For the 1800-1 season, Kemble again took up managerial duties, in the idea of purchasing, together with Mrs. Siddons, into the property, but, owing to some uncertainty in the title, the negotiations came to nothing. Kemble, instead, purchased, in 1802, a sixth share (William Lewis, the comedian's) of Covent Garden Theatre, paying, with the help of his friend, Heathcote, £10,000 down towards the £23,000 he was to be charged for it. He took a year's holiday for foreign travel between his Drury Lane period and his new responsibilities. At the time of his leaving Drury Lane, his salary, as actor and Manager, was, nominally, £56, 14s. a week. At Covent Garden, it was, independently of his proprietary interest, £36 a week.

Both Kemble and Mrs. Siddons now definitively quitted the House of Garrick, and, from the autumn of 1803 onwards, made Covent Garden their habitat, till each, in turn, bade farewell to the public from its boards. Kemble's income from Covent Garden, including his proprietary share, acting, and management, has been estimated as £2500 per annum. I have not been able to ascertain whether Mrs. Siddons, before quitting Drury Lane, received all her much-mentioned arrears

of pay from Sheridan. Into that second 'drowning gulph,' Covent Garden Theatre, she now put no capital, though, when Kemble went into the proprietorship, Mr. Siddons was, at first, mentioned, as likely to buy an additional share.

The curse of Sheridan seemed to follow Kemble from t'other house, for, when, on September 20th, 1808, Covent Garden Theatre became 'well alight,' and, in under three hours, the interior was destroyed, with all its contents, including the jewels and lace—fine, curious, unreplaceable—which Mrs. Siddons had been collecting for thirty years,<sup>1</sup> the cause of the fire was believed to have been the smouldering wadding of a musket, let off in Sheridan's *Pizarro*. The loss of property was estimated at £150,000. Kemble rebuilt his house in less than a year, the company acting during the interim, first, at the Opera House—then called 'the King's Theatre'—and, after, at the Haymarket Theatre.

Kemble made a justifiable choice when he married the widow Brereton, *née* Priscilla Hopkins. She was an active, garrulous little woman—whose 'Priscilla' her husband shortened into 'Pop,' and the late Mrs. Mair remembered that, in 1822, the ever laborious John could not start on a short Italian tour without studying grammar, dictionary, Dante, and Tasso beforehand, with the result that grammarless 'Pop' made the waiters understand when he could do nothing.

Aunt John, as the younger generation called her, was addicted to high society, and advantageously elated in it. While Kemble was abroad, during the hiatus between Drury Lane and Covent Garden (1802-3), she wrote from Lord Abercorn's, Stanmore Priory, to her husband's old 'flirt,' Mrs. Inchbald:—

"Our Friday Evening was most splendid and to me in every way triumphant . . . the Prince [of Wales] . . . would not allow me to stand and talked in the most familiar manner and the most friendly for an Hour all this in *presence* of my friend *Sheridan*. Sheridan was very civil, and so was I. . . .

<sup>1</sup> Among the lace was a point veil, nearly five yards long, that had been, Mrs. Siddons told Lady Harcourt, 'a toilette of the poor Queen of France and worth over a thousand pounds, but that's the least regret, it was so interesting!'—Undated letter, from Mrs. Siddons to Lady Harcourt, exhibited in the Guelph Exhibition.

Sheridan is little-minded enough to be vexed at seeing any of his performers admitted into the society he lives with. . . . I think the Houses I have been in during my Husband's absence has been most creditable and serviceable to him as he has been constantly kept before the eyes of the great world, passages in his Letters talked of, etc."<sup>1</sup>

The Kembles were even more intimate than Mrs. Siddons with the Greatheeds. In the library at Guy's Cliffe is a portrait of Mrs. Kemble, representing a buxom, *décolletée* lady in brown gown and scarlet turban. It was painted by the son of the house, Bertie (II), whose own head—by himself—artistic, ardent-looking, with abundant hair, high collar, and voluminous necktie, hangs in the same room.

Like Mrs. Siddons, 'Coriolanus,' in private life, could not always forget he was off the stage. He, too, had the trick of talking in blank verse, and the late Rev. C. E. Bodham Donne, whose first wife was Kemble's great-niece, used to tell a story of the actor's entering an umbrella-shop, picking out a walking-stick, and saying to the shopman—

"This likes me well. The cost? the cost?"

If, away from the theatre, he was not guiltless of posing—what tragedy actor ever was?—his manner was by no means all stage buckram. He was a kind, worthy, simple-hearted man, and he lived (to use Lamb's phrase concerning him) in familiar habits with half the well-known intellects of his day. The idea of paying his footing, *à la* Garrick, with 'turns,' recitations, or any other parlour tricks, was abhorrent to him. Where he went, he went as a gentleman like the others, never as the actor, off duty, but glad to be amusing. Lady Morgan's *Book of the Boudoir* gives a droll glimpse of him at a party at Lady Cork's in 1810. 'The Wild Irish Girl,' Sydney Owenson—she did not marry Sir Charles Morgan till 1812—was the new pet lioness. Kemble arrived when people were supping:—

"Mr. Kemble was evidently much pre-occupied and a little exalted. . . . He was seated *vis-à-vis*, and had repeatedly stretched his arm across the table for the purpose, as I

<sup>1</sup> The original letter, from which I quote, is in the Forster Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum.

supposed, of helping himself to some boar's head in jelly. Alas! . . . my head happened to be the object which fixed his attention, which, being a true Irish *cathah* head, dark, cropped, and curly, struck him as a particularly well organized Brutus, and better than any in his répertoire of theatrical perukes. Succeeding at last in his feline and fixed purpose, he actually struck his claws in my locks, and, addressing me in the deepest sepulchral tones, asked, 'Little girl, where did you buy your wig?'

The best thing Kemble ever said was his remark on Zoffany's picture of Garrick and Mrs. Pritchard in *Macbeth* that it really represented the butler and housekeeper quarrelling over the carving-knives. Again, he was funny—to use the word he prohibited—when he prefaced a comic song by saying it was a favourite with one of the first comic singers of the day, Mrs. Siddons. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Siddons (whom her official biographer terms 'a passable vocalist') *would* sometimes indulge a select circle with *Billy Taylor*, rendered in a style of exaggerated solemnity.

In convivial hours, which, fortunately, did not occur most nights, for he observed the Baron of Bradwardine's distinction between *ebrius* and *ebriosus*, Kemble drank, solemnly, as became an earnest tragedian, but to a degree that sometimes resulted in his slipping under the table. His prime of life was *circ.* 1800, and he might have urged the plea of the contemporary Orkney clergyman, called to reply to a charge of inebriety, "Reverend Moderator, I *do* drink, as other gentlemen do." Campbell told a story of how, in Paris, he and Kemble, returning from too liberal an entertainment at Mme de Staël's, fell discussing, in the carriage, whether Talma, being an actor, was as well worth meeting as an author. The argument grew personal, and finally, Campbell, in a rage, got out, and walked home. Next morning, 'with a faint recollection of what had happened,' he called on the festive John, whom he found just out of bed. "Ah, my dear friend, I was just sitting down to ask you to dine with me." "To meet Talma, of course?" "Come and see."

Scott loved Kemble for several reasons; primarily, because

he was 'a virtuoso like himself,' and, secondarily, because he was an imaginative and exceptionally cultured actor, and Scott forgathered with actors whenever he had the chance. It was at a dinner to William Murray, the actor (Mrs. Henry Siddons's brother), in 1827, that he first overtly acknowledged the authorship of the Waverley Novels.

When staying at Ashestiel, Kemble was Scott's *enfant gâté*. Himself drinking 'claret by the pail-ful,' he kept his host up to an unconscionable hour every night, and, in 1817, not only made Scott write noble verses for his Edinburgh farewell, but actually criticised and corrected them till he got them quite to his mind. It may be remembered (*v.* p. 33) that, in the early days, when Mr. Inchbald rode on horseback, Mr. Kemble was taken into the chaise by the ladies, and, throughout his life, his horsemanship left much to be desired. It was by reason of its deficiency that, in the morning, after his enforcedly deep potations of the vigil, Scott 'socked it home' on his guest as soon as the celebrated cavalcade, led by Maida, started for the day's adventures. Scott, says his son-in-law, used to chuckle, 'with particular glee,' over the recollection of how, one day, on an excursion to the vale of Ettrick, the riders, of whom Kemble was one, were pursued by a bull. "Come, King John," said the Laird, "we must even take the water," whereat he and his daughter plunged into the stream. But Ettrick happened to be full and turbid, and 'King John,' not liking the prospect, halted on the bank, and, in his solemn manner, exclaimed—

"The flood is angry, Sheriff,  
Methinks I'll get me up into a tree."

Kemble's farewell performances, in 1817—in March, in Edinburgh; in June, in London—were attended by demonstrations of his popularity. He was only sixty, but gout and increasing asthma were serious warnings, and, equally with his sister, he was resolved not to outact his popularity. When, on June 5th, he played *Macbeth* for the last time (with Mrs. Siddons, herself retired five years, as his Lady Macbeth), Charles Kemble, at the close, "received him in his arms, and laid him gently on the ground, his physical powers being unequal to further effort." His final London appearance was in *Coriolanus*,



MRS. SIDDON'S ONLY PORTRAIT AS LADY MACBETH





on June 23rd. Talma and Tieck were present at this historic leave-taking, and the latter described it in *Dramaturgische Blätter*. Every passage of the play that could be applied to the circumstances of the evening was seized by the audience. Four evenings later, a public dinner, presided over by Vassall Holland, 'nephew of Fox, and friend of Grey,' was given in Kemble's honour, and, for the occasion, Campbell composed the well-known 'Ode'—a laudation of the actor and his art—intended for Charles Young to recite after dinner. Since Shakespeare's sonnets, nothing more sympathetic has been written about a player than the second verse of this poem.

Mrs. Siddons thought an unnecessary amount of fuss was being made over her brother's withdrawal—considerably more than had been made over hers. "Well, perhaps, in the next world women will be more valued than they are in this," she sighed to 'Memory' Rogers.

Kemble's diminished income and what he called his 'crazy constitution' alike suggesting residence abroad, he and Mrs. Kemble settled for three years at Toulouse. Later, and after a short intervening visit to London, they took what one of the newspapers termed a 'Helvetic hermitage,' on 'the lake of Lausanne,' and there, on February 26th, 1823, the final call came, in the form of apoplexy, to John Kemble. He was 'blooded'—in both arms—but nothing could save him. "It is impossible to describe how he was esteem'd in this place," wrote Mrs. Kemble, from Lausanne, on March 24th, to Lawrence. The actor was interred where he died. His statue (in the guise of Addison's Cato), completed by Hinchliff, but commenced by Flaxman, stands 'in the glorious glooms of Westminster.' Originally placed in the North Transept, it was removed, in 1865, to its more congenial present position, near Campbell's statue of Mrs. Siddons, in St. Andrew's Chapel.

Kemble's widow settled, first, at Heath Farm, a house of Lord Essex's, close to Cassiobury Park, and, later, near Guy's Cliffe, at Leamington.<sup>1</sup> To Fanny Kemble's fine-pointed pen we owe some hints as to her ways at the former residence, which the letter from Stanmore, quoted above, helps us to appreciate. To her Aunt John, who was 'not at all superficially

<sup>1</sup> At both places, Mrs. Siddons, and her daughter, Cecilia, used to stay with her.

a vulgar woman,' 'gentility and propriety,' says Mrs. Fanny Kemble, 'were the breath of life.'

When her own hour struck—she outlived her husband twenty-two years—Priscilla Kemble was buried in the family vault of the Greatheeds and the Percys.

## XI

### OTHER BROTHERS AND SISTERS

AS a rule, the Kembles were unusually slender in youth, and unusually stout in later life. Mrs. Siddons's second brother, Stephen Kemble, alone, seems to have begun badly, if there be any literal truth in the legend that, in 1783, he being twenty-five, Covent Garden, desirous of engaging 'the great Mr. Kemble' from Dublin, got hold of Stephen from Capel Street, because he was so much bigger than his brother, John, at Smock Alley. In face, a Kemble, without the Kemble *hauteur*, Stephen, on probation, 'discharged the character' of Othello, but, says Boaden, with 'nothing of the subtle and discriminating character of his family.' Nature had been cruel in loading him with an excess of adipose tissue, but he ought not to have played Hamlet when he weighed eighteen stone, and possessed no qualification for the prince beyond being 'fat, and scant of breath.' A little later, and there were but two parts performable by him, Henry VIII and Falstaff. The second he is celebrated for having played—not wittily, nor drolly, but—*without padding*. John Taylor, who was his brother-in-law, alleges, however, that he supported the part 'with a flowing, manly humour,' and was, generally, anything but contemptible in characters 'of an open, blunt nature, and requiring a vehement expression of justice and integrity.'

Stephen married the Desdemona of his London début, Elizabeth Satchell. She was a delightful actress, the one perfect *Beggar's Opera* Polly since Lavinia Fenton became Duchess of Bolton. What Mrs. Stephen was on the stage—'immeasurably far from vulgarity,' yet evincing 'nothing of the world's refinement'—she appears to have been in life. As a player, she was as superior to her husband as, in a higher

degree, her sister-in-law, Mrs. Siddons, was to hers. But she faithfully appeared with him, and, though in demand as he never was, left London with him, when he, periodically, was 'sent down.'

Stephen's figure and want of art suggested Managership as a likelier walk than acting. Early in 1792, he took the Edinburgh Theatre Royal, but litigation with the previous Manager, Jackson, and, simultaneously, with Mrs. Esten, his competitor for the lesseeship, drove him to another theatre in Edinburgh, where, in less than a month, Mrs. Esten, through her influence over the Duke of Hamilton (*o mores !*) caused his performances to be prohibited. A year later, Stephen got the better of the lady, returned to the Theatre Royal, and, by dint of engaging his distinguished London relatives, and keeping himself in the background, achieved a success, which diminished towards 1800, at which date he left Edinburgh. During 1818-19, he was Manager at Drury Lane, and there introduced his son, Henry Stephen Kemble, an actor, who, it was said, possessed the strongest lungs and weakest judgment of any known performer. Stephen Kemble withdrew from active service shortly before his death, which took place on June 5th, 1822, at Durham. He was buried in Durham Cathedral. Of his daughter, Frances, sometime an actress, who married Robert Arkwright, a captain in a militia regiment and a grandson of Sir Richard Arkwright, we get a picturesque glimpse in Payne Collier's *An Old Man's Diary*.

It seems strange that Charles Kemble, the brother of John and of Mrs. Siddons, should have been alive in 1854, till we remember that he was eighteen years younger than the former, and twenty years younger than the latter. On the day he was born, he became uncle to Mrs. Siddons's year-old elder son, Henry, to whose son, also a Henry Siddons, Charles's daughter, Fanny, nearly became engaged. Like other uncles who are of an age to be their nephews and nieces' cousins, Charles Kemble was never, except sportively, 'Uncle Charles' to the young Siddonses. It was 'My Uncle John, and my Mother, and Charles.'

Charles Kemble started life as a clerk in the Post Office, but

gave up his berth a year after he secured it, and went straight to the stage. After a two years' novitiate in the provinces, he first played with his brother and sister at the opening of Sheridan's new Drury Lane, April 21st, 1794. He was Malcolm to their Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Like them, he proved an actor of gradual development, though always weaker than they. But he was distinguished, invulnerably a gentleman, the most chivalrous of stage lovers. His delivery must have been delightful. Westland Marston said of his Hamlet, "I had never imagined there could be so much charm in words as mere sounds." Playing every part, even Falstaff's, without the least 'charging'—in completely civilised taste—he made an ideal Cassio, Faulconbridge, Richmond, Laertes, Petruchio, Edgar, and the very Mercutio Shakespeare drew. Macready's remark that he was a first-rate actor in second-rate parts is corroborated by Sir Theodore Martin.<sup>1</sup>

There had been gossip as to John Kemble never encouraging a brother near the throne, in plays containing male parts of equal consequence, but when, in 1820, during his retired years, his Covent Garden partner, Harris, the chief proprietor, died, he showed a weightier generosity in assigning to 'Mr. Charles' his sixth share of the Covent Garden property in absolute fee. The theatre, still embarrassed by its 1809 building debt, was not doing well, but Charles, naturally, believed prosperity recoverable. The hope proved unjustified, and the expenses of the huge theatre well-nigh crushed the second Kemble Atlas burdened with sustaining them.

Charles's wife, born Maria Teresa de Camp, a Viennese dancer, a capable actress, and a minor playwright, might have been 'own sister' to another Viennese dancer, Eva Violette, afterwards Mrs. Garrick, in that, though sharper tempered, she was equally virtuous and equally vivacious, while history associates both—mysteriously—with the Empress Maria Teresa. Mrs. Charles Kemble retired from the stage in 1819, twelve years after marriage.

Of the Charles Kembles' four children, the eldest, John Mitchell Kemble, grew up to be Examiner of Plays and the erudite author of *The Saxons in England*. To him, Tennyson,

<sup>1</sup> *Monographs*, 149, 1906.

in their Cambridge days, addressed the sonnet, *To J. M. K.*, 'in itself, a diploma,' said Julian Young.

When, in 1829, Charles Kemble's Management of Covent Garden had brought him to the verge of bankruptcy, his elder daughter, Fanny, aged twenty, was the Iphigeneia who came forward to save her father's credit. Sir Thomas Lawrence, so well qualified to pronounce, and claiming 'almost a Father's interest for her,' said she had 'eyes and hair like Mrs. Siddons in her finest time,' that her voice was 'at once sweet and powerful,' and that she was 'blessed with a clear Kemble understanding.' Still, none but a few enthusiasts maintained that the undoubtedly gifted girl had caught her aunt's mantle. It was no small thing that, at the close of her first season, Charles Kemble was able to pay off £13,000 of debt.

After three successive seasons, Fanny went with her father on tour to America, and there married Mr. Pierce Butler, of Philadelphia, a Southern planter. Her brief return, in 1847, to the London stage, is a negligible fact in dramatic history. To the first instalment of her autobiography, *Record of a Girlhood*—the best work of her life—a great many persons have owed an acquaintance they might never otherwise have gained with the outlook and family life of players of high character.

Charles Kemble's younger daughter, Adelaide, so profoundly admired by Edward Fitzgerald, Lord Leighton, and Henry Greville, was a singer of rare dramatic power. She gave up her profession at the end of 1842—during her second Covent Garden season—to become the wife of Mr. Edward John Sartoris. In later life, she published a readable book called *A Week in a French Country House*, and two other volumes of stories. That she was an impressive creature Lady Ritchie's two Prefaces to the 1902 edition of *A Week in a French Country House* would, alone, demonstrate. Her portrait, prefixed to the same edition, shows the persistence of the Kemble profile.

The Charles Kembles' younger son, Henry, went into the Army, and was the father of a sound actor, recently dead, Henry Kemble, well remembered in *The Man from Blankley's*.

Mrs. Siddons's sisters, Frances and Elizabeth, appeared in London before her brothers. Frances made her first appear-

ance, as Alicia, in *Jane Shore*, on January 6th, 1783, whereupon Sophy Weston wrote to Dr. Whalley, "How I rejoice in our divine Melpomene's amazing popularity! It is feared she will hurt herself by introducing a sister who is not at all approved." On the following March 1st, we find Elizabeth Kemble making a second<sup>1</sup> appearance—as Portia.

Mrs. Siddons could obtain her sisters engagements and some good parts, but she could not make them actresses. They were ill-advised to come to London. For the public, they were too like herself—but 'as moonlight unto sunlight.' The *timbre* of their voices, says Boaden, so closely resembled Mrs. Siddons's as to vex and weary an audience, hearing either of them in a play with her. From all other players and their supporters the two young women had nothing to expect but hostility. Here were Sarah, Frances, Elizabeth—and John and Stephen were expected! The then very narrow theatrical area was threatened with a Kemble inundation. But the Miss Kembles' worst hindrance, as has been said, was their lack of dramatic power. It was in vain that Frances attended Thomas Sheridan's elocution lectures in Hickford's Great Room in Brewer Street. The kindest criticism on her was that her diffidence obscured her talents. If formed by nature for anything histrionic, it was to play heroine's confidante. She was, no doubt, feminine and pleasing, and, certainly, the immortal half-length of her Reynolds painted, and John Jones engraved, represents a young lady with whom any man might, without reproach, fall in love.

That acrimonious outlaw, George (or 'Shakespeare') Steevens, did fall a little in love with her, but John Kemble and Mrs. Siddons made it no secret that his attentions were unacceptable, and, in the fulness of time, another Shakespearean scholar 'came along,' in the shape of Mr. Francis Twiss, with more solid proposals. A 'thin Dr. Johnson without his hard words,' Twiss was a man of as steady character as the Kembles themselves, and that straight and honest personality, Mrs. Inchbald, described him as one 'whose integrity nothing could warp.' He had been credited with cherishing 'a hopeless

<sup>1</sup> No record of the date of the first seems to have survived.



passion for Mrs. Siddons,' but, whether he had or not, on May 1st, 1786, he led to the altar her 'soft and mitigated likeness.' I Francis take thee Frances.

*Mrs. Siddons to Whalley*, August 11th, 1786: "Yes, my sister is married, and I have lost one of the sweetest companions in the world. . . . She has married a most respectable man, though of but small fortune, and I thank God that she is off the stage." Six or seven weeks later: "Mrs. Twiss will present us with a new relation towards February."

The fortune, as judicious Mrs. Siddons had observed, was small, and the 'new relation' (Horace Twiss) was shortly followed by four others. From 1807 onwards, Mrs. Twiss, assisted by her husband and daughters, kept a fashionable parlour-boarders' school in Bath. The terms were high—a hundred guineas, with 'Entrance five guineas,' but, on the other hand, holidays were few—'in each year one vacation only, which will last six weeks.'<sup>1</sup> We may picture a school somewhat on the lines of the Lambs' Mrs. Leicester's, where little Miss Manners, aged seven, inquires of the other infants, "Pray, ladies, are not equipages carriages?" One of the Prince Regent's nine adopted children, the only girl, was at Mrs. Twiss's. "Aunt Twiss's school participated in the favour which everything even remotely associated with Mrs. Siddons received from the public," remarks Fanny Kemble.

Horace Twiss's juvenile journal is lying before me. A true boy speaks in the following engaging fragment:—

"Journal Friday 17th July 1801.—H. Twiss born February 28th 1787, now aged 14 years, 4 months, 19 days. Up too late: got first in Italian: whipp'd up my breakfast quick for fear of my Father. Dined with G. Siddons [Mrs. Siddons's younger son, æt. sixteen]. Reconciled him to Miss Mary Godfrey. Stole Miss Squire's book, and returned it. Father gave me sixpence. P.S. Quarrelled with Julia Willis—*N.B.* The dinner was Calf's head, roast mutton, potatoes, and currant-tart—

"Saturday, July 18th 1801.—My Father not well: gave us a holiday. Walk'd with George Siddons to Mr. Wroughton's.

<sup>1</sup> I quote from the seminary's prospectus, as given by Mr. Fitzgerald, *The Kembles*, i. 231-32.

Call'd on Ma'am Stratt. G. Siddons din'd with us. Drank tea with the Miss green Godfreys. *N.B.* Everybody had tart at dinner but me. *P.S.* Dinner was Salmon, roast veal, roast potatoes, and currant-tart, etc. etc."

In spite of his abstention from currant-tart, the boy grew up to originate the *Times* summaries of Parliamentary debates, and to write Lord Eldon's biography, to become an M.P. and the vice-chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, and to have his *mots* quoted throughout London. He composed Mrs. Siddons's farewell address, he assisted when she gave her readings, and he was one of the executors of her will.

It is a melancholy fact that human weakness was stronger than the much-remarked family solidarity of the Kembles. "Alas!" said Mrs. Siddons, in the evening of her life, to Rogers, "after I became celebrated, none of my sisters loved me as they did before!"

Like Frances, Elizabeth Kemble had been apprenticed to a milliner, not bred to the stage. But the call of the blood prevailed, and, in her case, a most genuine love of acting. Old and stout and married, she still could tell Macready that 'when on the stage, she felt like a being of another world.'

All the same, during her two or three seasons at Drury Lane, she was usually untroubled by the call-boy, as some one phrased it. In 1785, she married a godson of the Young Chevalier, Charles Edward Whitelock, dentist and actor, of Whitelock and Austin's north of England circuit, and went with him, in 1793, to America, where they played in Wignell's company. Mrs. Whitelock was 'for a time the leading tragic actress of America,' says Mr. Brander Matthews. After her return, in 1807, to England, at the age of forty-six, she was unsuccessful at Drury Lane. She had become a lady of ample and globular form, and, in London, tragedy (to her astonishment) had no further use for her. She settled, with her husband, in Newcastle, where they were highly respected, and in 1811 or 1812, she was acting there for the elder Macready. Mrs. Siddons, consistently *couleur de rose* when speaking of any Kemble to an outsider, writes thus, concerning Mrs. Whitelock, to James Ballantyne, in a letter (from 'Leeds, July 5th, 1807') preserved in the Morrison Collection:—

"She is a noble, glorious creature, very wild and eccentric, not so old as myself by six years, not so tall, not so handsome, but in all else my equal, if not superior. I have known nothing of her from my childhood till now."

At a later date, Campbell, engaged in 'scraping up information' out of everybody for his Siddons 'Life,' to this end established himself for two days in Mrs. Whitelock's neighbourhood. He thought her a nice old lady, "very like Mrs. Siddons, and the remains of nearly as fine a woman; but," he adds, "she is Mrs. Siddons without her fudge and solemnity" [from a pious biographer and literary executor this is strong!]"—"just what Mrs. Siddons would have been if she had swallowed a bottle of champagne."

While, in appearance, Mrs. Whitelock was a blonde caricature of Mrs. Siddons, in manner and conversation she was all that was opposed to Mrs. Siddons's 'stillness.' She used to preface her exaggerated statements with "I declare to God," or "I wish I may die," and when Mrs. Siddons sought to stem her loquacity with "Elizabeth, your wig is on one side," she would nonchalantly reply, "Oh, is it?" and, giving the light auburn *coiffure* a shove that 'put it quite as crooked in the other direction,' proceed with her discourse.

Mrs. Jane Mason was another sister of Mrs. Siddons's of whom history gives little record beyond the facts that she lived in Edinburgh and brought up six children to the stage.

Mrs. Siddons had yet another sister, Anne, or Julia Anne, born in 1764. The potential turpitude of a large family, drained from its other members, seemed infused into this poor creature, whose only excuse—probably a valid one—for her conduct could have been that she was deficient in moral responsibility. Herself on the stage, and married to a country actor named Curtis, while, at the same time, leading a loose life in London, she constantly appealed to public charity, announcing herself as the youngest sister of Mrs. Siddons. She gave an objectionable lecture ('on chastity and other delicate subjects,' says the *European Magazine* for November, 1783) at Dr. Graham's Temple of Hymen, and tried, or pretended to try, to commit suicide in Westminster Abbey. These

incidents taking place during Mrs. Siddons's Brereton-*cum*-Digges autumn of 1783, the unfriendly press made capital out of them, assigning them to Mrs. Curtis's 'dire necessity,' the result of the 'marble-hearted' cruelty of 'the five player Kembles (for the father is a player) and the mighty Mrs. Siddons.'

Her husband proving a bigamist, in 1792 Anne Kemble married a man named Hatton, whom she accompanied to America. In 1800, the pair settled at Swansea as hotel keepers, and the widow subsequently taught dancing at Kidwelly.<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Siddons allowed her £20 a-year, provided she lived a hundred and fifty miles from London, and John Kemble, at his death, left her £20 a-year. As Anne Hatton, or 'Ann of Swansea,' she passed her later existence at Swansea, where, in 1838, she died. She was a large, lame woman, and squinted. She possessed imagination of a sort, and published many novels, beside poetic trifles "which the bibliographers, if not the critics, prize."

<sup>1</sup> See *Cymru Fw* (Cardiff), Oct. 19th, 1889.

## XII

### PIZARRO AND SHERIDAN, AND VARIOUS PLAYS AND PLAYWRIGHTS

DURING the closing years of the eighteenth century, those whom Byron denominated the Tedeschi dramatists were in fashion. And not only *Göts* and *Die Räuber* from Germany, but the flood of intellectual jacobinism that, for some time, had set in from France, together with the spreading ripples from a new school of English poetry—between 1796 and 1800, Coleridge was 'in blossom'—these influences had combined to form a taste for naturalism in drama. Throughout at least one season, the London *illumineds* had bewailed the unsympathetic pieces put on at 'Dreary' Lane—

"Too long have Rome and Athens been *the rage*;  
And classic Buskins soil'd a British stage."

There was a real opening for the 'burgess drama' Diderot had invented and Sedaine expanded.

At the close of 1796, before this fountain was unsealed, things were looking so bad that Mrs. Siddons wrote, in exasperation, to a friend, "Our theatre is going on, to the astonishment of everybody. Very few of the actors are paid, and all are vowing to withdraw themselves: yet still we go on." Sheridan himself saw that two or three more plays like Whitehead's *Roman Father*, Miller's *Mahomet*, and Reed's *Queen of Carthage* would bring down his income with a run. Possessing, as he did, in equal proportions, the dramatic and the theatrical instincts, he put into rehearsal, in 1798, Kotzebue's *The Stranger*, the selected English version of which, by Benjamin Thompson, he shaped and strengthened, till every word of his adaptation was, Rogers heard him say, his own.

In *The Stranger*, the distinctive Muse of Kotzebue, and of everything understood in England, at his date, by the term, 'German Theatre,' rampages.<sup>1</sup> The play is domestic, tearful, philosophic. In Act IV., Baron Steinfort thus addresses Count Waldburg—

"Oh, Charles! awake the faded ideas of past joys. Feel that a friend is near. Recollect the days we pass'd in Hungary, when we wander'd arm-in-arm upon the banks of the Danube, while nature opened our hearts, and made us enamoured of benevolence and friendship."

This was *echt deutsch*, it was also redolent of the 'nature' of Diderot and the susceptible school. Sheridan threw in a song, set to music by Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, the original verse of which is better forgotten than its parody in *The Anti-Jacobin*, where Troubadour, caressing the bottle of *noyau* under his cloak, trolls

"I bear a secret comfort *here*," etc.

When Kemble produced *The Stranger*, British critics, to a man, fell upon the play. Practically repeating Garrick's objection to *Douglas* (expressed in an unpublished letter to Lord Bute) that "the language is too often below the most familiar dialogue," they said—what may equally be said of Ibsen's 'theatre'—that its diction was flaccid and flat. As guardians of public morals, they had worse fault to find with a *dénouement* in which a husband takes back his wife, repentant after what one disapprover termed 'an extra-connubial attachment.' This is a stage situation with which frequent repetitions have since familiarised us, but, a century and a decade ago, it outraged 'proper feeling,' and caused the serious-minded to anticipate an approaching date 'when not a child in England will have its head patted by its legitimate father.'

There was, thus, something of the success of scandal about *The Stranger*, which, in spite of bathos and irrelevant scenes, prospered mightily. It was sincere and realistic. Thackeray explains its charm in the 'Mrs. Haller' chapter of *Pendennis*. The claim of Kotzebue's plays on remembrance rests on the fact that they marked an advancing wave in the progress of

<sup>1</sup> See James Smith's travesty of *The Stranger* in *Rejected Addresses*.

tragic drama from the representation of action to the representation of character.

Mrs. Siddons played Mrs. Haller twenty-six times in four months, and *The Stranger* remained what was then styled a standing play during, and long after, the Kemble period. On March 18th, 1876, it was given by Phelps and Miss Geneviève Ward as a 'revival' *matinée* at the Gaiety Theatre, and, still more recently, Wilson Barrett presented it at the New Olympic.

As Mrs. Haller, we may picture Mrs. Siddons shining and melancholy, as in the Lawrence portrait, with the 'toothache bandage.' Those who most deplored that Kotzebue had not written his play for the security of British families and the edification of young persons, agreed that her conception of 'the reformed housekeeper' was perfect in its 'propriety and judgment.' She herself must have enjoyed the part, for her daughter, Sally, wrote to Miss Bird: "My Mother cries so much at it that she is always ill when she comes home."<sup>1</sup>

Having made this palpable hit with his first Kotzebue discovery, Sheridan, for the ensuing season, took in hand, with still more gusto, and putting more of his superlative stagecraft into the alteration, another, more stirring, play—this time, a melodrama—from the same source, *Pizarro*.

The success of its predecessor was favourable to it, and all the boxes were 'bespoke' early. The scenery was prepared, the parts were assigned, Sheridan alone was behindhand with an indispensable element, the complete script of the play. Michael Kelly sketches, in his *Reminiscences*, the agitation on the stage, when, on May 24th, 1799, with the first performance<sup>2</sup> actually in progress, and far advanced, part of the stuff—some of the speeches in the fifth act—were still to seek, Mrs. Siddons, Charles Kemble, and Barrymore being the three waiting performers. "Mrs. Siddons told me, that she was in an agony of fright."

Sheridan, on the other hand, was never more himself. From the prompter's room upstairs, where he sat scribbling, he descended every ten minutes into the greenroom, bringing what was finished, while 'abusing himself and his negligence,

<sup>1</sup> *An Artist's Love Story*, 44.

<sup>2</sup> Surely, in spite of Kelly's statement, a rehearsal only?



MRS. SIDDONS  
BY LAWRENCE





and making a thousand winning and soothing apologies.' Long afterwards, Payne Collier found, among Larpent, the Examiner of plays' collection of dramatic MSS, Sheridan's copy of *Pizarro*, 'with a few corrections hit off in the most flashing way and dashing hand.' No wonder the corrections were few.

Of all the plays of which Mrs. Siddons was original principal exponent, *Pizarro* proved the most popular, in spite of its being only a *refacimento* by Sheridan of an English translation (Sheridan could not read German) of '*Rolla's Tod*,' the second of Baron von Kotzebue's two '*Peru-Dramen*.' Read to-day, the English acting version of *Pizarro* appears totally to lack Sheridan's magic touch, it is turgid, bombastic, ranting—all that Sheridan might have written another *Critic* to ridicule, and much that Frere, Canning, Ellis, and Gifford did ridicule in their skit, 'The Rovers.' Sheridan's life as a dramatist had terminated in 1780, when, aged twenty-nine, he first took his seat in the House of Commons, but still he depended for his income of £10,000 a year upon the prosperity of the theatre, and, on this occasion, at all events, pitched on a play that had commercial value. *Pizarro* brought, at the lowest estimate, £15,000 to Drury Lane.

'The Pizzarro,' as Mrs. Siddons wrote it, deals with the Spanish conquerors in Peru. Pizarro is their general, and Elvira (Mrs. Siddons) is Pizarro's mistress. Over against the ferocity of the one and the volcanic temperament of the other are set the heroic magnanimity of Rolla, the Peruvian patriot (John Kemble) and the sweetness of Alonzo's wife, Cora. The situation of England in 1799 gave a superficially 'topical' character to Rolla's 'bursts' of patriotic appeal to his Peruvians, and these 'bursts' were, in reality, adapted, not from Kotzebue, but from Sheridan's political speeches. The house, from 'the full-price master to the half-price clerk,' rose to 'Our King! our Country! and our God!' George III applauded and approved, and, when, a little later, the Duke of Queensberry asked why the stocks had fallen, a stockjobber replied, 'Because at Drury-lane they have left off acting *Pizarro*.'

The play ends with Elvira—the splendid-creature-under-a-cloud—being led away to be tortured, while Rolla dies of wounds, received while successfully bringing back Cora's

che-ild to her from the Spaniard's camp. *Pisarro* is arrantly transpontine.

At first, Mrs. Siddons objected to the part—a laborious one—of the 'camp-follower,' but Mrs. Haller had proved a personal triumph, and 'Sid' was urgent with his wife that her one chance of touching her arrears from Sheridan was to keep on with him. Sheridan felt nervous as to her adaptability to the new part, which, in the event, she magnified and elevated till, with the exception of Mrs. Haller, it became the most 'capital' of all the rôles originally represented by her. In its initial season, she played it thirty-one evenings consecutively—an unparalleled run. Master Betty (with whom, to the credit of her self-respect, Mrs. Siddons never acted) caught his Roscian fire when, at eleven years of age, at Belfast, entering a theatre for the first time, he watched her play *Elvira*, in 1802. He was, says Dr. Doran, 'stricken,' he went home in a trance, he declared he would die or be an actor.

The eighteenth century stage owned, in succession, three superexcellent actor-managers, Cibber, Garrick, and Kemble, and three patentees as worthless as these men were valuable, viz. Rich, Fleetwood, and Richard Brinsley Sheridan. A large theatre, with its complicated detail, could only flourish by dint of 'the restless, unappeasable solicitude' Garrick bestowed on it; it was impossible for any one to combine—as Sheridan professed to do—an active political life with the successful care of the more exacting 'House' in Drury Lane.

Financially considered, Sheridan was what Mrs. Siddons, in 1796, styled him, 'uncertainty personified,' and (in 1798) 'that drowning gulph.' Times were when such principal actors as the arch-empress of the drama and John Philip not only went unpaid as to salary, but found every stiver of a benefit looted. This happened to Mrs. Siddons in 1796, and, during her brother's temporary secession, 1796-1800, she was made so indignant that, sometimes, after the curtain had risen, the unremitting one had to drive at a gallop to her house (where he found her sewing!) and there exert his utmost irresistibility before she would return with him, and go on. For the season, 1789-90, she retired from Drury Lane; again, in 1793, she

retired; in company with Kemble, she was finally driven away in 1802. In September, 1799, she wrote, to Mrs. Pennington: "I have just received a letter, in the usual easy style, from Mr. Sheridan, who, I fancy, thinks he has only to issue his Sublime Commands," etc. In the previous January, her daughter, Sally, wrote: "I wonder if Mr. Sheridan has any notion that she is really at last determined to have no more to do with him."

Something, though not much, might be urged on Sheridan's side where Mrs. Siddons was concerned. Over contracts, she was, as we have found (pp. 101 and 111), a hard bargainer; she jolly well saw, as our boys say, that she did not accept sweating terms. The following, from a letter of January, 1792, written by the first Mrs. Sheridan to her husband, is noteworthy, "I see Mrs. Siddons is announced. Have you brought her to reasonable terms?"<sup>1</sup>

Charles Surface that he was, Sheridan captivated every one he wished to captivate, not least those who had to suffer from his maddening qualities. Lovers of Lamb will recollect the instance of Lamb's godfather, Fielde, the Holborn oilman, who, as sole remuneration for many years' nightly illumination of the orchestra and various avenues of Drury Lane Theatre, received a pretty liberal issue of orders for the play, together with the honour of Sheridan's supposed familiarity, and "was content to have it so," since he regarded the latter half of his recompense as "better than money." Not every one could afford to take Fielde, the oilman's view. The poorer actors thought it werry 'ard that, at Christmas Eve and Christmas Day rehearsals, in contrast to Garrick, who, on these occasions, had always allowed 'a comfortable cold collation' and drinkables, Sheridan, the great diner-out of his generation, did not stand them a single glass of beer. James Smith related how Delpini, the clown, was goaded by non-payment into telling Sheridan plainly what an honest fellow thought of him,<sup>2</sup> and Miss Constance Hill, in her pleasant volume, *The House in St. Martin's Street*, narrates, from the previously unpublished

<sup>1</sup> *Sheridan*, by W. Fraser Rae, ii. 143, 1896.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Grimaldi's story of Sheridan, *Life and Times of Frederick Reynolds*, ii. 231-33.

journal-letters of Susan Burney, a better story, which she permits me to quote. The scene is laid at Dr. Burney's—

"‘Indeed, Mr. Sheridan he use me very ill,’ cries Pacchierotti. ‘I assure you I have a great will . . . *voglia come si dice?*’

"‘A great *mind*,’ said I.

"‘A great mind to call him Rascal. He provoke me too much! . . . I will write him a note.’

"Accordingly he took from his pocket a bit of paper, and wrote the following lines:—

"‘Pacchierotti sends his comp<sup>ts</sup>. to Mr. Sheridan, and is very displeased to be obliged to call him Rascal—but his conduct is in everything so irregular he can give no better title to so great Breaker of his Word. D——n him and his way of thinking, which I wish it may bring him to the Gallows.’"

But the opera singer never sent this ‘incendiary letter,’ and Sheridan continued, according to Mrs. Thrale’s *mot*, to grow ‘fat like Heliogabalus on the tongues of nightingales.’

There is ‘no pause i’ the leading’ of contemporary opinion as to Sheridan’s moral irresponsibility. It is unanimous. For a last touch of it, we may take what Campbell told Moore as to there having been found, at Sheridan’s death, “an immense heap of letters, which he had taken charge of to frank, from poor husbands to wives, fathers to children, etc.” Some one has yet to arise who will whitewash Sheridan’s character, and make a satisfactory job of it.

‘Sheri’ (as his first wife, in her letters, wrote it) was always readier at accepting responsibilities than at working them off. Whenever anything in the nature of a claim was magnanimously presented to his Keltic imagination he acted decisively in response. The instance of his immediately paying a tradesman when he proffered his bill as a debt of honour is symptomatic.

After Shakespeare’s plays, *The School for Scandal* and *The Rivals* continue to be the nation’s favourite dramatic classics, growing, not diminishing, in both popular and critical esteem. Granted that Sheridan ‘played the sedulous ape’ to Buckingham, Farquhar, and Congreve, that he was not

a dramatist accustomed (in Mr. Archer's phrase) to think in terms of character, that he exhibited a gentlewoman guilty of malapropisms which would have been flagrant in the milliner who supplied her with caps, that he made his clowns (as, in *The Critic*, he whimsically acknowledged) scarcely less elaborately pungent than his fine gentlemen. When all is said, his two great comedies hold their own round the world, as an eternal demonstration that wit is not the exclusive property of the Latin races. *The School for Scandal* tingles with wit more many-faceted than exists elsewhere throughout the range of '*Welllitteratur*' in as small compass.

Resembling Burke, in being *un homme de rien*—simply 'standing on his head'—Sheridan, like Burke, rose to a distinguished position in public esteem, while, socially, he rose still higher, his character and advancement, in combination, reminding us of Disraeli rather than of the more illustrious Irishman, Sheridan's contemporary. The fact that he was, at once, managing proprietor of Drury Lane and a Minister of the Crown is, to a modern imagination, in itself piquant. That he never rose high in office was largely due to the fact of the long Tory ascendancy which covered most of his political life. Except to readers of history, his name, as occurring in public affairs, is best remembered by the tradition of the florid—in the end, futile—speeches he delivered on the charge concerning the Begums of Oude, in the first year of the greatest state trial since Charles I's. His best memorial, in his public capacity, is that in those venal days, he, who had not inherited a shilling, could justly boast 'an unpurchasable mind.'

Next after wit, tact was the 'note' of his utterances. His good taste in personal reference was never better shown than when, in 1787, he was entrusted with the task of making such an *amende* to 'Princess Fitz' in the House as should pacify feelings outraged by Fox's demi-official denial there, four nights previously, of the fact of her marriage to 'Prinny.' Yet no man's jests at the expense of others were more pointed, or possessed a flavour more wholly their own than Sheridan's, and we seem to see the teasing, fun-loving eyes, set in the heavy-featured Bardolph countenance, as we read that when,

remarking in a Parliamentary speech that Dr. Willis, George III's insanity specialist, professed to have the power to read the heart from the face, he added, looking at Pitt, that 'this simple statement seemed to alarm the right honourable gentleman.'

His lightest quip was the rueful one he made when acquaintances marvelled at his being able to sit swallowing port in the Piazza Coffee House, while the other M.P.s—their debate broken up from sympathy—were out watching

"the long column of revolving flames  
Shake its red shadow o'er the startled Thames,"

as his uninsured property in Drury Lane sank to ashes. "A man may surely take a glass of wine by his own fireside," said he. His stoicism may have contained something of insensibility. Levity was his vice.

Sheridan's is an elusive character to estimate. Probably, Professor Brander Matthews best summed it up, as from within, by saying, "when he had once put himself in a position where he was unable to do exactly what he had agreed to do, and what he always desired to do, he ceased to care whether or no he did all he could do." With greater hardness, and looking at Sheridan from the standpoint, not of faith, but works, the anonymous contemporary author of *Sketches of Distinguished Public Characters of George the Fourth*, held that "none who enjoyed so much personal influence ever did less for the world." Posterity is fairly agreed that Sheridan's brilliant life lacked purpose, and most of us share the impression he made on Wilson's Shepherd, who 'couldna thole to hear sic a sot as Sherry aye classed wi' Pitt and Burke.'

Turning to lesser people who wrote pieces in which Mrs. Siddons shone, it is sadly true that the rank and file of the dramatists 'were with want of genius curst.' No character created by Mrs. Siddons has continued to hold its own on the stage. Forgotten are those stilted, stodgy tragedians, Cumberland, Jephson, Murphy, each of whom mistook a procession of verbiage for a play; equally forgotten are the meagre comedians and farce-writers, of whom Frederick

Reynolds, Dibdin, and Cherry may be named as representative. Mrs. Siddons's biographer, Boaden, was among those who came to 'an untimely beginning' in the department of tragedies. His effort was called *Aurelio and Miranda*, but, in spite of Mrs. Siddons's acting, and in spite of the author's asseveration that 'the three first acts were rather powerful in interest,' it failed dismally. It was founded on *Ambrosio, or the Monk*, and 'Mat' Lewis, the author of that nerve-racking romance, was himself eminently successful at Drury Lane with *The Castle Spectre*, in which Mrs. Jordan played Angela, the heroine. *The Castle Spectre* drew great and constant houses, and, for a time, eclipsed Shakespeare. As Byron sagely said, "It is fitting there should be good plays, now and then, besides Shakespeare's," though, as critics judge, Lewis's numerous pieces would scarcely be called good plays. Still, "*tous les genres sont permis, hors le genre ennuyeux*," to that *The Castle Spectre* did not belong. It may be doubted whether Mrs. Radcliffe or Lewis did more to kindle the love for all that Catherine Morland thought 'horrid'—and vastly delightful. The German tales of mystery were the source at which both authors drank.

It was regrettable, both for his sake and the theatre's, that, in spite of his extreme and naïf delight in Mackay's performances of the Baillie and Dominie Sampson, Scott would never undertake to dramatise any of his novels or poems, leaving the task, and the profit, to other, inferior hands. His early prose attempt, *The House of Aspen* (also drawn from a German *Quelle*), was his solitary direct contribution to drama, and this John Kemble put in rehearsal (in 1799) but did not produce.

On November 3rd, 1784, Mrs. Siddons first played Margaret of Anjou, in Franklin's *The Earl of Warwick*, not a new drama, nor a good one, yet one in which, during a long series of years, her acting was warmly praised. In 1785, Mrs. Tickell wrote to her sister, Mrs. Sheridan, her ohservant comments on the rendering—

"I may tell you that Mrs. Siddons was charming and very different from what we had ever seen of her. If you remember the part, there is not only a great deal of ranting,



that is in the style of *Zara*, but also a sort of irony and level speaking, or rather familiar conversation that placed her quite in a new light. I thought she was very great indeed. Yet in your life you never saw anything so like Kemble in every look and word as her familiar tones."

This is interesting, as showing Mrs. Siddons capable of successfully varying the large style and heroic delivery natural to her, as to all her kin, with colloquial realism.

Almost immediately after first playing Margaret of Anjou, she created the part of Matilda in *The Carmelite*, a part Cumberland professed to have arranged in all its features to suit her. The modern 'star' play was already creeping into vogue. The Rev. William Mason designed *Elfrida* with an eye to Mrs Hartley's every *moyen*, and Lalor Sheil contrived his *Adelaide* expressly for Miss O'Neill. Genest said: "If a list were to be made of all the pieces in which an Irishman is pressed into the service merely for the sake of Johnstone [commonly called Irish Johnstone, an actor of value] it would be no short one." Dutton designated the innovation 'the present preposterous system,' and when, in 1825, Pierce Egan published *The Life of an Actor*, he spoke of the old-fashioned mode of play-writing as entirely exploded in favour of the author — 'Mr. Give-up-everything' — writing up to some particular actor, actress, or group.

Round about 1800, several ladies launched tragedies. Byron thus disposed of them: "Women (saving Joanna Baillie) cannot write tragedy: they have not seen enough nor felt enough of life for it."

The Scotchwoman Byron credited with good tragedies produced eight volumes of them. Three consisted of a 'Series of Plays, in which it is attempted to delineate the stronger passions of the mind—each passion being the subject of a tragedy and a comedy.' They were designed for the stage, but, *pace* the opinion of England's then foremost man of letters, they were inadequate to sustain stage tests. It was expected that Mrs. Siddons and Kemble would make some *coups de théâtre* in *De Montfort* (the tragedy that delineated the passion of hate), but the play, produced on April 29th, 1800, oozed through eleven nights, and then

(owing, said Sheridan, to the perverted taste of a public that preferred to see elephants on the stage) stood stagnant, till Kean again failed with it, in 1821. It was over-moralised, mechanically organised, palpably one in a set. Yet it has beauties, and—as a play to be read—vigour, that go some way to explain Byron's salvo of Miss Baillie, as well as the eulogium of Scott, who, while placing Campbell and himself infinitely below Burns among Scots poets—'not to be named in the same day'—regarded Joanna as 'now the highest genius of her country.' In point of fact, she possessed the idyllic, not the dramatic, gift.

Miss Burney penned a tragedy, *Edwy and Elgiva*, and Mrs. Siddons played in it, but it was visited with damnation on its first night of life. The saving sense of the absurd that sparkles in every line of Fanny's diary deserted her when she tried to soar.

*Percy*, a Tragedy by Hannah More, had every advantage from Garrick's encouragement when launched in 1777, and Mrs. Siddons and Kemble did their best with it in 1787, but the public found it 'sickly,' it had no root. That Mrs. Siddons herself knew what constitutes a good play appears from her remark in a letter to Whalley dispraising *Great-heed's*, "All the people in it forget their feelings to talk metaphor instead of passion."

### XIII

#### PROMINENT THEATRICAL CONTEMPORARIES

BY their original numbers, augmented, as we have seen, by their marriages within their own profession, the Kembles, only less than by their talents, character, and prudence, bade fair, at one time, to block theatrical avenues and monopolise emoluments."<sup>1</sup> In the greenroom their style was termed 'the family-acting,' and, by the openly envious, 'the Kemble rant.' Their recitative method, though partly determined by the blank verse tragedies then in vogue, was also a manner they adopted from temperament, and by preference. The spirited manner of Garrick had been exercised in the same parts in which the Kemble brothers were as declamatory as Quin.

At no period of her great career had Mrs. Siddons cause for serious anxiety as to a rival. It was inevitable, when she first became celebrated, that the sexagenarian playgoer—an evergreen plague—should talk heavily to younger people about Susanna Cibber and Hannah Pritchard. Not only did old Lady Lucy Meyrick dilate on the plebeian (!) emotion of Mrs. Siddons's Lady Macbeth compared with Mrs. Pritchard's, but Lord Harcourt, the husband of one of Mrs. Siddons's closest friends, while allowing that she could 'assume parts with a spirit,' held her altogether second in the somnambulist scene to the great Hannah, her tragic predecessor.

From the Bath Theatre, as might have been expected, came the first of the younger ladies whose names were, in succession, for a short time, whispered as possible disturbers

<sup>1</sup> "Drury Lane will be in the hands of the Kemble family, in less than six years."  
—The *Morning Post*, April 31st, 1784.

of Mrs. Siddons's peace. Elizabeth (sometimes called Anne) Brunton came up to Covent Garden for the 1785-86 season, and some spasmodic endeavours were made in the press to persuade the public that in the new arrival it would find a more than Siddonian star. The *Green-Room Mirror* said Miss Brunton was 'the Roscia of the age! and *phœnomenon* of *Nature*!' adding, with a touch of anti-climax, that she promised 'to prove a principal support of the *British stage*.'

Although London at large did not confirm the enthusiasm of Bath, Miss Brunton was acknowledged to be a capable actress. She played at Covent Garden till 1792, when, having, in the previous year, married Merry, who, as 'Della Crusca,' had formerly, in Florence, been a prominent member of the *Arno Miscellany* set, she withdrew from the London boards, to reappear, in 1796, as a star of the first magnitude in the United States, where she settled, lost her husband in 1798, and married Warren, the Philadelphia and Baltimore Manager. This Miss Brunton is not to be confounded either with her younger sister, Louisa, who played comedy at Covent Garden from 1803 till 1807, when she became Countess of Craven, or with her niece, another Miss Elizabeth Brunton, whose stage career extended from 1815 to 1849. This third Miss Brunton married the actor, Frederick Henry Yates. She was Edmund Yates's mother.

Late in life, Mrs. Siddons spoke of Miss Sarah Smith, afterwards Mrs. Bartley, as having been the lady next held up, after Elizabeth Brunton, as her likely rival, but such a suggestion must have been idle, sterling actress though Mrs. Bartley was. Combe (who disliked Mrs. Siddons) publishing, in 1812, his 'Tour of Doctor Syntax,' vainly tried, by ignoring the great actress, to exalt Miss Smith above her, in the following passage :—

" The Drama's children strut and play  
In borrow'd parts, their lives away ;—  
And then they share the oblivious lot ;  
Smith will, like Cibber, be forgot !  
Cibber with fascinating art  
Could wake the pulses of the heart ;  
But hers is an expiring name,  
And darling Smith's will be the same."

A sounder judge than Combe, Mrs. Siddons's worshipper, Macready, found, when he acted with Miss Smith, that "of the soul, that goes to the making of an artist, there was none."

Before me, dated 'Dec. 28. 1814,' lies an unpublished letter<sup>1</sup> from Mrs. Siddons to her niece, 'Nanny' Twiss, in the thick of which—with one of those abrupt changes of subject that so often indicate, on the correspondent's part, a strong, veiled interest in the new topic—these words occur: "You see Miss Oniel has *quite extinguish* me. She has really a great deal of talent and I hope the public will continue their adoration of her, for I hear she is a very amiable good young woman." The writer had retired two years previously, yet the fact rankled that the public should be paying adoration at another shrine. To Rogers, Mrs. Siddons frankly admitted that the public had a sort of pleasure in mortifying their old favourites by setting up new idols.

Belonging to the long line of conspicuous Irish players, Eliza O'Neill, aged twenty, made a début in Dublin in 1811. Three years later occurred the inevitable migration, and, on her first night at Covent Garden, she took the audience by storm. She was naturalesque and mobile, and Talma himself spoke of her voice of tears. Beauty, also, she possessed, and the gift of blushing rosily under stage emotion, though, beyond that power, her dramatic expressiveness resided in her postures and gestures, not in her face. Hazlitt acutely observed a 'fleshiness' about her manner, voice, and person which incapacitated her for the Volumnia of Rome and of Shakespeare.

She had sense enough to refuse the part of Lady Macbeth. The trenchant mother of an Archbishop of Dublin thus contrasted her with her infinitely greater predecessor:—

"Miss O'Neill is said to be more natural than Mrs. Siddons was, but to gain no more by it than waxwork does by being a closer representation of nature than the Apollo Belvedere. Very few discriminate sufficiently in the arts between the merit of an *exact* representation and an *ennobled* one; and people are not fair enough in general to allow that something must be

<sup>1</sup> Kindly placed at my disposal by Mr. Frank Dillon.

sacrificed of fidelity in order to reach that elevated imitation which alone gives strong and repeated pleasure."

Miss O'Neill had five years in which to prove her secondariness. In 1819, Mr. (afterwards Sir) William Wrixon Beecher, M.P. for Marlow, swept her off the boards. When the wife of a baronet, she is said to have affected—as Lady Derby (Miss Farren) is also said to have done—an amusing ignorance of the details of stage life.

A shoal of young women formed themselves on Mrs. Siddons. Genest particularly mentions Mrs. Weston, whose performance of Lady Macbeth was a close imitation. In her retired years, Mrs. Siddons had *protégées*, and instructed them (non-professionally) in acting. One was Miss Dance, whom the past-mistress warmly recommended, begging her friends to be present on March 20th, 1821, at *The Stranger*, at Covent Garden, when Miss Dance was to make her first appearance on any stage. Miss Dance possessed good abilities and good—somewhat Siddons-like—looks, but she neglected work for 'balls and parties,' and was discharged in disgrace. She had failed to learn from Mrs. Siddons the great lesson that the laurel must be paid for.

Not only had Mrs. Siddons imitators, but a mimic—in the shape of Mrs. Mary (Becky) Wells, or Mrs. Leah Sumbel, who was so very much a scapegrace that both Miss Farren and Mrs. Siddons refused to play if she were given the secondary parts. At Covent Garden, in 1788, and before and after that year, in the provinces, Becky Wells used to represent 'a scene from Two Great Tragic Actresses'—Mrs. Siddons and Mrs. Crawford—but beyond impudence, a leering smile, and a known character for liveliness, the performance was only what they then called 'Là Là,' *i.e.* indifferent, and in every way inferior to the imitations of that brilliant amateur, Simons. Palmer, nevertheless, paid Mrs. Wells £50 a night to give her imitations in Bath.

It was the speciality of Elizabeth Farren, on the stage, to represent the well-bred woman of fashion, smiling, adroit, quick,—some critics said too quick—at recognising a *double entendre*, while remaining as invulnerable in manner as she was in private character. Frigid—in the latter capacity—she may have been,

and long-sighted she certainly was, for she remained unwon till nearly forty, for the sake of the twelfth Earl of Derby, a man of such quaint appearance that he looked a caricature in real life. The attachment between them covered eighteen previous years, Lord Derby's first Countess not having had the good taste to disappear till within seven weeks of his second marriage. Early in 1796, we find Mrs. Piozzi writing to the Rev. Daniel Lysons: "Will Miss Farren's coronet *never* be put on? I thought the paralytic countess would have made way for her long ago." All London knew the state of affairs, and appreciated the skill with which Miss Farren kept her unalterable Earl (the phrase was Horace Walpole's) at thus-far-and-no-farther point. Partly as a result of having directed amateur theatricals at the Duke of Richmond's, she visited, meanwhile, in very exclusive sets. Walpole, in a letter to Miss Berry, records the fact of supping, in 1791, at her house—the Bow-Window house in Green Street—to meet Sir Charles and Lady Dorothy Hotham, Kemble, Lord Yarborough's sister-in-law, Mrs. Anderson, and that conclusive guarantor of a hostess's reputation, Mrs. Siddons.

Miss Farren, certainly the most eminent *comédienne* of Mrs. Siddons's earlier prime, had been originally introduced to Colman by Younger, for whom she had played in Liverpool. She came, at about eighteen, to the Little Theatre ('the Haymarket') in 1777, and began work as Miss Hardcastle. On her slight shoulders descended, at Drury Lane—where she became, from 1778 onwards, principally acclimatised—the mantle Mrs. Abington was soon to let fall, and she wore it with the elegance with which she wears the fur-trimmed white silk 'John' cloak in the Lawrence full-length, till Mrs. Jordan, taking the comedy throne Miss Farren, at marriage, vacated, brought in another, less rarefied, type of light acting.

On the date (May 1st) of Miss Farren's wedding, Mrs. Siddons referred to her marriage in an epilogue, by Mrs. Piozzi, unexceptionable—to use a word of the period—in taste. Many of the journalists, on the other hand, were fulsome. One writer said—what was, no doubt, true enough—that "the profession she has just quitted will acquire a respectability from her exaltation (such are the prejudices of the world) which no talents,

however extraordinary, could procure for it." Twelve years after her marriage, Creevey, after dining, with his wife, at Lord Derby's, recorded—

"... at Lord Derby's nobody but us. Lord Derby excellent in every respect, as he always is, and my Lady still out of spirits for the loss of her child, but surpassing even in her depressed state all your hereditary nobility I have ever seen, tho' she came from the stage to her title."

The true Thalia of our Melpomene's prime was not Miss Farren, but she who, in Boaden's for once picture-making words, "ran upon the stage as a *play-ground*, and laughed for sincere wildness of delight." If ever a human creature was designed by nature to please and entertain, it was Dora Jordan.

To Tate Wilkinson she owed the surname that suggests a baptism. When, in 1782, as Dora Bland, she arrived, aged twenty, in Leeds, with her mother, brother, and sister, none of them 'well accoutred,' he admitted her into his company, after briefly testing her merits. Previously, in Dublin and Cork, she had undertaken anything and everything Daly wanted, and when Wilkinson gruffly asked whether her line was tragedy, comedy, or opera, she replied, 'All.' Wilkinson expressed astonishment, but the protean aspirant was successfully cast, one night, Calista, in *The Fair Penitent*, another, Priscilla Tomboy in the farce of *The Romp*, another, William ("she sported the best leg ever seen on the stage," the Rev. John Genest apprises us) in Mrs. Brooke's opera, *Rosina*. Her playbill name was 'Miss Francis,' but, before she had been long in Yorkshire, family reasons 'indicated' another change of name, and one fortified by 'Mrs.' "You have crossed the water, my dear," said Wilkinson, "so I'll call you Jordan." "And by the memory of Sam," he would add, when gleefully boasting, in after years, of his association with the comedy queen, "if she didn't take my joke in earnest, and call herself Mrs. Jordan ever since!" When, one August evening of 1785, as the *Poor Soldier*, she was trying to exhilarate a York audience, Mrs. Siddons happened to be in front. As reported by Wilkinson, her comment on the performance was to the effect that Mrs. Jordan was better where she was than to venture on the London



boards. The doubt she expressed was, at the moment, justified by the limited enthusiasm manifested by the York house. Fourteen months later, we find Mrs. Siddons writing from London to Whalley: "We have a great comic actress now, called Mrs. Jordan; she has a vast deal of merit, but in my mind is not perfection."

The day was at hand when, in London, the narrower-minded lovers of Mrs. Jordan would inquire, concerning Mrs. Siddons, 'Where is Nature?' while the duller among Mrs. Siddons's admirers would retort, concerning Mrs. Jordan, 'Surely she is vulgar.' And Dora Jordan's day outlasted even the ten-year day of the Blessed Damozel, for it commenced with her first Drury Lane season, 1785-86, and only terminated in 1814, when, 'a-tiptoe,' professionally, 'on the highest point of being,' she suddenly quitted the London stage, two years before her forlorn death at St. Cloud. She had, formerly, always talked of retiring whenever Mrs. Siddons should retire.

In spite of the 'steady, melting eye' that sank into Lamb's heart, Mrs. Jordan's face was not what they then termed 'critically' handsome, though her figure received the high encomium of Sir Joshua Reynolds's statement that it was the most perfect in symmetry he had ever seen. She had a better gift, for an actress, than beauty—that of being whatever character she assumed.

She subjugated all the men in the audience; she seemed created to dry the tears Mrs. Siddons bade flow; like Fontaine, the celebrated Dublin dancing-master of her time, she seemed to be for ever saying, '*Egayez-vous, mes enfans, il n'y a que ça.*' All that was so sunshiny and full of fun in her appearance, the elastic spring, the artless gestures, the quickness of turn—gained value from her humourous delivery, her little breaks of voice and arch inflections. She made such words as 'best gown,' 'but I don't—I won't,' 'I a'n't deaf,' each a whimsical miracle, and Macready speaks of 'certain bass tones' which 'would have disturbed the gravity of a hermit.' Galt says that the way she pronounced the word, 'ecod!' sounded as if she had taken a mouthful of some ripe, delicious peach. Coleridge, discoursing, in 1825, at Lamb's Colebrooke Cottage, avowed that it was the witchery of her tone that suggested the idea in his *Remorse* that, if Lucifer had been permitted to retain his angel

voice, hell would have been hell no longer. The best description of a laugh I know is Leigh Hunt's description of Mrs. Jordan's.

In spite of her Leeds début as Calista, tragedy was outside Mrs. Jordan's range, nor was she capable of personating a fine lady. She, thus, never crossed the true path either of Mrs. Siddons or of Miss Farren. Comedies supplying two first-rate parts where she would not have eclipsed Mrs. Siddons being few, Mrs. Siddons and she, so long contemporaneously at Drury Lane, very rarely acted together. They did so in *Pizarro*, and also (Nov. 24th, 1797) in *The Rivals*. Mrs. Tickell contributed an interesting aside on Mrs. Siddons, when she wrote, in 1785, that Mrs. Jordan ought to "make a sweet tragedian, because, in *Twelfth Night*, her voice in the pathetic is musical and soft, and she has the Siddons 'Oh!' in perfection." Mrs. Jordan was far less Euphrosyne off the stage than on it, but, across the lamps, no one ever guessed that she knew nervousness, depression, or annoyance. In her maturity, she was aware of her limitations. "If the public had any taste," she said, in the greenroom, to John Taylor, "how could they bear me in the part [Rosalind] which . . . is far above my habits and pretensions?"

For twenty years, thanks to Mrs. Jordan, the Duke of Clarence enjoyed as much domestic happiness as the Royal Marriage Act permitted to him. She bore her sailor prince five sons and five daughters, and shared her income with him, calling the provincial tours that swelled it her 'cruises.' Her dismissal, in 1811, was due to no fault of hers, and was attended by every circumstance of respect. Having left England to avoid creditors, her debts being the consequence of bills given by her to relieve her worthless son-in-law, Alsop, Mrs. Jordan died, on July 3rd, 1816, of jaundice and dejection.

Little needs to be said concerning other actresses who flourished during Mrs. Siddons's prime. The career of Harriot Mellon as an actress was infinitely less interesting than as a woman. She, again, was Irish, and the countrified, un-stagy look she always retained, together with a kind of shy boldness, constituted her charm. At Liverpool, in the summer of 1796, Queen Siddons paid her the supreme com-

pliment of leading her forward by the hand, and, in her flat, forcible way, thus addressing the assembled company: "Ladies and gentlemen, I am told by one I know very well that this young lady for years in his father's company conducted herself with the utmost propriety. I therefore introduce her as my young friend." The same bounty was afterwards extended to the same actress in the Drury Lane greenroom. It was a standard to live up to.

Miss Mellon was Nature's own Audrey, but only when more eminent actresses were ill did she play leading business. On the other hand, romance must cling to the memory of one who (in part, by her constant kindness to an ill-tempered mother and beery stepfather) attracted to herself a fortune of a million and a half. She married Tom Coutts, he eighty, she thirty-eight; twelve years later, she married the ninth Duke of St. Albans, he twenty-six, she fifty. She believed in luck, and was born lucky. She was a rattling, coarse, free-handed creature. She might have sat to Thackeray for the Fotheringay.

Mrs. Siddons wrote, in 1793, concerning a once celebrated actress, "The charming and beautiful Mrs. Robinson! I pity her from the bottom of my soul." Was she thinking of Perdita's arthritic helplessness and suffering, or of the Florizel episode, and its sequel? As we have seen, she thanked God when her sister, Frances, was safely off the slippery boards, and she roundly (and, surely, too sweepingly) termed the Drury Lane greenroom of her time 'a sink of iniquity.' Much though she loved her art, she almost overestimated the danger incurred by the maid who unmask her beauty to the playhouse.

Considering her rather *judging* disposition, only too few sentences of Mrs. Siddons's are recorded as to the art of other players. When such sentences occur, they go to the root of the matter, as where, in a letter to Mrs. Pennington, concerning the singer to whom, in Haydn's opinion, angels should have listened, she writes: "Mrs. Billington is a most surprising creature, but her talent plays only round the head, without ever touching the heart." Mrs. Siddons was feelingly persuaded of the truth that if technique is the body of art,

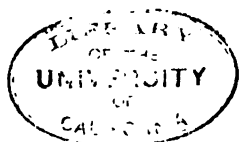
emotion is its soul. She is discriminating, again, in the following appraisal of a male fellow-player:—

"The Pierre was a Mr. Snow (a banker's nephew) whose stage name is Hargrave: he is a sort of professional amateur, with a good figure, and may do better hereafter; but at present he is hard and dry: the wheels of his passion want oiling, and his voice is harsh. . . . He wants to play Othello, but I fear it will not do: he would be more fit for Iago with a little practice."

Chief of those who passed as heirlooms from the House of Garrick to Sheridan's Drury Lane was Garrick's right-hand man, Tom King, and he became Mrs. Siddons's sincerest early friend there. Within his scanty plot of ground, King was an exquisite actor. His style was dry—*brut*. He seemed made to uphold sparkling dialogue, to articulate pointed epigram and neat antithesis. In his element as Touchstone, he was the perfect Lord Ogleby (in Colman and Garrick's *The Clandestine Marriage*), and he shone with diamond lustre in the *tours de force* of Sheridanian comedy, Puff and Sir Peter Teazle. He made the regulation forty lines of every prologue or epilogue he uttered, in themselves, 'a little drama.' Off the boards, he was an agreeable person and a gentleman, and at his house, at Hampton, says John Taylor, Mr. and Mrs. Siddons and Kemble spent some of their Christmas holidays.

After Brereton's breakdown, the second line in tragedy at Drury Lane was filled by Bensley, Wroughton, Palmer, and Barrymore. In Bensley (unless '*Carlagmulus*' nodded when he wrote of him) there must have been a streak of greatness, Wroughton did traditional things in a safe way, the others acted 'with much exactness,' as the stereotype of the day had it, though, sometimes, it is to be feared, giving their parts more mouth than passion.

To modern ideas, the London stage, between Henderson and Kean, would, as regarded its men-folk, have appeared better supplied on the comedy than the tragedy side. The tragedians were hampered by a formula, or convention, which involved a 'classic' cadence in their speech, worlds away from the tone of natural conversation; the comedians, on



the other hand, drew inspiration solely from actuality. It seems safe to believe that a modern playgoer, could he be transported to their day, would carry away little save weariness from an evening with those orotund tragedians, while he would derive an immense amount of pleasure from such actors as the gay, efficient, well-bred William Lewis, the male counterpart of Miss Farren, from Elliston, from Jack Bannister, from Parsons, from Suett, from Munden, from Liston, and from Charles Mathews. Comedy, in that age, was in what John Bernard termed a plethora of health. Small parts were taken by good men, and hardly a varlet would go on to deliver a message but was a fellow of spirit and intelligence.

When Kemble entered upon the Management of Covent Garden, he gave a conciliatory dinner at his own house to the performers who were to be under his command. They numbered some of the time's best actors; among them, George Frederic Cooke, Lewis, Mrs. Davenport, Mrs. Mattocks, Mrs. Beverley, Mrs. Glover, Farley, Hull, Charles Kemble, and Mrs. H. Siddons. The Covent Garden company accepted Kemble unwillingly. His known pride and authoritativeness of bearing prejudiced them against him. In the event, he got on better, even with the unruly and insolent G. F. Cooke, than might have been expected.

Cooke was a half-baked Edmund Kean. He had none of Kean's refinement, and knew little beyond the slang and bravado of tragedy. He hoped to be the rival of Kemble—'Black Jack,' who, he boasted, would, one day, 'tremble in his pumps' on his account. Possibly, he might have outrivalled Kemble, had he combined with his own salience the other's idealism and sanity. As it was, he—of whom, in 1801, young Dermody had written to Sydney Owenson, "Cooke is a constellation, the everything, the rage"—came to be only describable as a drunken genius.

From September, 1803, to May, 1810, Cooke acted, on and off, with Mrs. Siddons in *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and many other plays, but her opinion of him is not recorded. Like Macklin, he seemed formed for sardonic parts, and malignancy (as in *Iago* and *Shylock*) was his strength. One evening—

when he was to have played Douglas to Mrs. Siddons's Lady Randolph—found him so flushed with the grape, as they said then, that young Harry Siddons had to read the part for him.

In considering Cooke's biography, the constant wonder is how he lived as long as he did. Hissed and degraded, he, at last, drifted to the provinces, and thence to the United States. In 1812, he died in New York, and Kean, when there nine years later, paid for a monument for him on which was inscribed,

“ . . . In various parts his matchless talents shone ;  
The one he fail'd in, was, alas ! his own.”

The selfsame words might have formed Kean's own epitaph.

It is an interesting speculation as to whether Mrs. Siddons's temperament required other good actors in order to bring out the best of herself, or whether, with Rachel, she would have said—or thought—concerning an imbecile cast, “*Mon entourage n'a été que pour me mieux faire ressortir.*” My own impression is that, though she appreciated and praised good work (especially in beginners, and in her own autumn), she was rather singularly self-sufficient in her acting, and independent of the people around. After the death of Henderson, George III understood she ‘had wished to have him play at the same house with herself.’<sup>1</sup>

Among those who acted with, and were commended by her, Charles Young said the most enthusiastic and well-judged things about her. There is small need to give the outlines of Young's career, since that little masterpiece, *A Memoir of Charles Mayne Young*, by the actor's son, is well known to general readers. Leaving out Cibber's ‘Apology’—which possesses greater, though different qualities—Young's biography is the most indispensable, and the wholesomest, theatrical memoir that exists, completely free from banal and done-to-death anecdotes. If ever a man helped, by his private life and character, to grace the stage, the amiable, high-hearted Charles Young did so.

<sup>1</sup> *Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay*, edited by Austin Dobson, ii. 343.

When, on April 21st, 1794, Mrs. Siddons first played Lady Macbeth in Holland's new Drury Lane, under Kemble's Management, an aiery of children represented the black spirits and white, red spirits and grey, and among them was a tiny creature named Edmund Kean. In 1805, when Kean, then eighteen, was a stroller, he and his only living peer again met, at Belfast, on the boards. Kean was Osmyn to the star's Zara, and Norval to her Lady Randolph. As Osmyn, he forgot his words, and Mrs. Siddons, guessing, or detecting, drink, shook her head gravely. But she felt his latent power. He played, she said, 'well, *very* well.' This was the only occasion on which she acted with that unhappy genius, before whom, it was said, with some exaggeration, Kemble 'faded like a tragedy ghost.'

'The small man, with an Italian face and fatal eye,' 'Mr. Kean, from Exeter,' did not get his chance before a London audience till Mrs. Siddons had been eighteen months retired. From the testimony of eye-witnesses who saw both, it would appear that he made the same tremendous attack on the nerves that she had done.

Soon the new romantic had his school as well as his following, half a dozen lesser men were aping his instantaneous transitions from the hyper-tragic to the infra-colloquial, and we may remember how, in *Pendennis*, Mr. Manager Bingley 'darted about the stage and yelled like Kean.' By virtue of his diametrically opposite methods, it was inevitable that Kean should now be pitted against Kemble, as Garrick had, at first, been pitted against Quin. Mrs. Trench gives a glimpse of Kean's originality, in saying that her children, to whom the wailing tragedians, with their raised voices, made Shakespeare practically unintelligible, enjoyed every word spoken by Kean—"his tones are so natural."

For eighteen years, the prodigy earned £10,000 a year—and, in 1905, Messrs. Christie sold the green silk purse Browning gave Irving, which had been found in Kean's pocket without a sixpence inside. Byron committed to his journal for February 20th, 1814, a reasonable hope that Kean, by getting into good society, would be prevented from falling like Cooke. But the mania for drink, contracted

during a boyhood of semi-starvation, proved too strong. Added to it, there seethed in Kean something not unlike Swift's *sæva indignatio*, a madness of rage against things as they are. One of the saddest letters ever written, addressed by Kean, under date, 1821, to 'Dear Jack' Lee, his secretary, was sold, in 1906, at Messrs. Sothebys'. Thus it ran :—

"I have been mad for three days, imagined that all my enemies had congregated for the purpose of destruction, aided by demons, riflemen, and rattlesnakes — excellent sport; the delirium subsiding, Death placed his ugly visage in my view. I have been very drunk—very often—once so bad that I could scarcely hobble through Macbeth. Huzza! boy—all fun, all jollity, all good fellowship, but, heart, heart, when wilt thou break?"

The most recently living actor with whom Mrs. Siddons appeared was William Charles Macready, whose hour-glass ran till 1873. He and Young were happily associated with John and Charles Kemble in Lady Blessington's tribute, "Were I called on to name the professional men I have known most distinguished for good breeding and manners, I should name four tragedians—the two Kembles, Young, and Macready."

Macready was a youth when, in 1812, just before her retirement, Mrs. Siddons went to Newcastle to give two performances in his father's theatre. The most stimulating lesson in his artistic education was playing with her on these occasions. The Manager's son, as junior lead, was sent to her hotel to rehearse Beverley to her Mrs. Beverley, she fifty-seven, her stage husband, nineteen. As he entered the room where the great lady awaited him with her stately daughter, Cecilia, his nervousness was so obvious that, to lighten matters, she said, in her elephantine way, "I hope, Mr. Macready, you have brought some hartshorn and water with you, as I am told you are terribly frightened at me."

In the evening, on the stage, when his first scene with her commenced, the sensitive novice again stood for a moment petrified by her presence, but, upon her kindly whispering the word, he was able to proceed. Before long, he caught the glow, and began to forget self-consciousness,



till, in the last scene, as Mrs. Siddons stood by the side-wing, waiting her entrance cue, he uttered a crucial sentence in such a way that "she raised her hands, clapping loudly, and calling out, 'Bravo, sir, bravo!' in sight of part of the audience, who joined in her applause.

The next evening, the last of her two-nights' engagement, Mrs. Siddons played Lady Randolph, and Macready was her son. Some of her Newcastle friends had written beforehand to her to beg that one of her pieces might be *Douglas*, young Macready's 'years and ardour suiting so well the part of Norval.' After the play ended, she sent for him, and spoke the following valedictory:—

"You are in the right way, but remember what I say, study, study, study, and do not marry till you are thirty. I remember what it was to be obliged to study at nearly your age with a young family about me. Beware of that: keep your mind on your art, do not remit your study and you are certain to succeed . . . study well, and God bless you."

Her advice to the player—which might be paralleled in a letter from Garrick to Powell—fell on good soil. Macready ('moral, grave, sublime,' as Tennyson called him) held the highest place in tragedy for nearly a quarter of a century. He consistently traced inspiration to Mrs. Siddons.

"Her words," he said, "lived with me, and often in moments of despondency have come to cheer me. Her acting was a revelation to me, which ever after had its influence on me in the study of my art. Ease, grace, untiring energy through all the variations of human passion, blended into the grand and massive style, had been with her the result of patient application. On first witnessing her wonderful impersonations I may say with the poet:—

"Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
When a new planet swims into his ken."

"And I can only liken the effect they produced on me, in developing new trains of thought, to the awakening power that Michael Angelo's sketch of the Colossal head in the Farnesina is said to have had on the mind of Raphael."

#### XIV

### HER HUSBAND AND CHILDREN

WHAT of the interior at 14 Gower Street, and, later, at 49 Great Marlborough Street? Mrs. Siddons's existence was at the farthest remove from the masquerade of prank and vagary a citizen imagination associates with *la vie d'artiste*. Nursing her babies, adding up her weekly accounts, eating her favourite roast beef, this Madame Sarah showed no artistic eccentricity in private life. One likes to think of gorgeous Tragedy, sitting by the lamp-lit table, surrounded by her early circle of pretty faces and youthful talk—talk, one gathers from the family letters, that would not have 'strained a Boswell to bursting,' but filled with affectionate amenity and light-heartedness.

It is doubtful whether 'the modern student' would feel much interest in Mr. Siddons, were details concerning him thick as leaves in Vallombrosa. They are not. He left fewer traces of himself in written record than the consort of any celebrity of as recent a period as Mrs. Siddons's. Five plain, respectable letters by him are to be found in Whalley's 'Journals and Correspondence,' and four or five, in manuscript, in the Hardwicke Papers, and among the British Museum Sheridan Correspondence. It transpires that he was, not exactly a nonentity, but undervitalised, and bounded by himself. In his favour, it should be said that, however unresistingly he may have slid into the habit of letting his wife support him, he was a decent liver,<sup>1</sup> and neither ill-treated her,

<sup>1</sup> I have seen an unpublished letter, of 1792, from Mrs. Piozzi to Mrs. Pennington, referring to some scandal about Mr. Siddons, in which Mrs. Siddons, for a time, believed. Taylor's *Records of my Life*, ii. 85, leads one to imagine that the scandal was a slander.

nor gambled away her earnings. He retired from the stage, but, says Boaden, only because he was too mediocre an actor for the family's credit; he lost a considerable sum of money, made by Mrs. Siddons, over the part proprietorship of Sadler's Wells Theatre, but, there, his intentions had been meritorious. It needed a Phelps to make 'the Wells pay.

It is hard for a man to play perpetual second fiddle to a wife, and the man who does so gracefully, and without foregoing his claims to respect, must be gifted with some hidden quality surpassing even his partner's brilliancy. It may be granted that Mrs. Siddons's prince consort was fussy and insignificant, and, as a consequence of his subsidiary position, occasionally ill-humoured, but, on the whole, he seems to have sustained the rôle of Melpomene's husband with reasonable sense and taste. He was an actor—and he had to undergo the humiliation of not acting, and of seeing his better half play her great parts supported by her brother. Something, in addition, may be urged for him on the score that a wife vowed (as his was) to the exclusive worship of her own relations is a cross for any man. Altogether unamiable he could not have been, since he was liked, as well as esteemed, by a brother-in-law. "The confidence between Mr. S. and my Brother is unbounded," writes Mrs. Siddons, in a letter of 1798. It was inevitable that he should not be named in the diaries of eminent individuals who recorded having met Mrs. Siddons out dining. In Windham's Diary, under May 15th, 1791, we may, however, read that the writer, having called, and found Mrs. Siddons out, "sat some time with Mr. Siddons."

Like other subordinate husbands, 'Sid' talked lengthily of his wife. That he had some sense of humour, and could even 'pull' an interlocutor's 'leg,' seems evidenced by a speech the late Mr. James Dibdin reports him as making to Dr. Mackenzie of Portpartick. "Do you know?" he asked, "that small beer is good for crying? The day that my wife drinks small beer, she cries amazingly; she is really pitiful. But if I was to give her porter, or any stronger liquor, she would not be worth a farthing."



MRS. SIDDONS'S HUSBAND



When the Lawrence troubles thickened round his daughters, Mr. Siddons, as a counsellor and helper, left something to be desired. He was, said his wife, so harsh and repelling that confidence, on their part and hers, was alienated. Most likely, he forgot he had once been young. Messrs. Allen permit me to quote a letter, in which Mrs. Siddons, scarified, at the time, by 'briery Circumstance,' and exasperated by her husband's attitude, reveals his shortcomings to Mrs. Pennington—

"You desir'd me to tell you how Mr. S. received the information which I told you had been communicated; with that coldness and reserve which had kept him so long ignorant of it, and that want of an agreeing mind (*my* misfortune, though not *his fault*,) that has always check'd my tongue and chilled my heart, in every occurrence of importance *thro' our lives*. No, it is not his *fault*, it is his *nature*. Nay, he wou'd never have hinted to Sally anything of the matter, if I had not earnestly represented to him how strange such reserve must appear to her; whereupon he testified his total disapprobation, nay, abhorrence of any further intercourse with Mr. L[awrence], whom he reprobated *with the spirit of a just man ABOVE the WEAKNESSES* which are the misfortunes of the Race in general."

Probably, the sympathies of 'Sid' and Sally—so John Kemble familiarly named the pair—were not more imperfect than Sir Walter and Lady Scott's. A good deal has been made of their 'separation,' of which the malignant Mrs. Galindo gives the date—October, 1804. Mr. Siddons's ever-increasing rheumatism had long before decided him in favour of Bath as an abiding-place. Cecilia, his ten-year-old daughter, was at Bath, at the Miss Lees' school, Belvedere House; his other children were dead, or scattered. He had little in common with his wife's fashionable set. He was inured to her absences on tour, and she, though, hitherto, she had nursed him through severe rheumatic attacks, was too busy to miss him. So to Bath he went, and he and Mrs. Siddons paid each other, from time to time, visits of considerable length.

A significant letter, of December 16th, 1804, given by Campbell, from Mrs. Siddons to her husband, after their

so-called separation, concerning his ultimate disposition of their property, runs as follows :—

“MY DEAR SID,—I am really sorry that my little flash of merriment should have been taken so seriously, for I am sure, however we may differ in trifles, *we can never cease to love each other*. You wish me to say what I expect to have done—I can expect nothing more than you yourself have designed me in your will. Be (as you ought to be) the master of all while God permits, but, in case of your death, only let me be put out of the power of any person living. This is all that I desire; and I think that you cannot but be convinced that it is reasonable and proper.—Your ever affectionate and faithful  
S. S.”

This undemanding letter in itself gives evidence of the simplicity and sincerity of its writer.

Mrs. Siddons was in Bath during February, 1808. In the *Bath Herald*, for Saturday, February 6th, I read: “at the Theatre Royal Last night but two Mrs. Siddons in the Tragedy of Venice Preserved”; in the same, for February 11th: “Mary Queen of Scots. Queen Mary by Mrs. Siddons Positively the last night of her performing here.” On the following March 11th, William Siddons died, unexpectedly—“as he had prayed to die, without a sigh,” Mrs. Siddons told Lady Harcourt. In the *Bath Journal*, for Monday, March 14th, one may read: “Friday died at his Lodgings in this City William Siddons, esq: the very worthy and affectionate husband of the justly celebrated Mrs. Siddons. Though long an invalid dissolution may be said to have been sudden as he had passed the preceding evening with a circle of friends in his usual social and pleasant manner.” The *Bath Chronicle*, in its next issue, practically copied the *Journal* notice, and a similar item appeared in the *Bath Herald*. The address of Siddons’s lodgings is not given in any of these newspapers. In the Bath Abbey Register, an entry reads, “William Siddons was buried on March 16, 1808.” In 1908, Miss Harriot Siddons and her brother, Mr. Henry G. I. Siddons, grandchildren of Mrs. Siddons’s second son, George, placed a tablet in Bath Abbey to William Siddons’s memory. It seems unlikely that Mrs. Siddons should have erected no monument over her husband’s grave; one can only suppose

that the original stone has been moved, and lost, during one of the changes effected in the Abbey in the course of the intervening century. The present tablet bears for inscription: "Sacred to the Memory of William Siddons Esq: who died at Bath, 11th March, 1808."

His bleakness and untowardness now forgotten, William Siddons's widow wrote of his death, two or three weeks after it occurred, to Mrs. Piozzi:—

"... I shall feel it longer than I shall speak of it. May I die the death of my honest, worthy husband, and may those to whom I am dear remember me ... as I remember him, forgiving all my errors, and recollecting only my quietness of spirit and singleness of heart."

Since Mrs. Siddons was bread-winner and mother both, she, necessarily, had to leave her girls, when children, and, later, when invalids, under other feminine care than her own, while she was away, earning for their wants. In the direction of practical thought for them, and care for their future, this great artist was every inch a mother. When, in 1786, Whalley named to her his apprehensions of some undesirable marriage threatening his pretty niece, she responded—"You could not speak to one who understands those anxieties you mention better than I do." Later, when her girls were 'out,' she encouraged eligible young men, but, at this date, Sally was only eleven, and Maria seven. Mrs. Siddons's sixth and youngest child was born, it should be noted, twenty years later than her eldest.

Mrs. Siddons belonged to the type of mothers who frankly admire their children, and love to discourse of them. On four separate occasions, she wrote to Whalley—

in 1785, "Sarah is an elegant creature, and Maria is as beautiful as a seraphim. Harry grows very awkward, sensible and well-disposed,"

in 1786 (January), when George was newly born, she described him as "healthy and lovely as an angel," and—this was her joke—"very like the Prince of Wales!"

in 1786 (August), "My ... children are ... well, clever, and lovely,"

(October) "... Sally is vastly clever; Maria and George



are beautiful; and Harry a boy with very good parts, but not disposed to learning."<sup>1</sup>

In 1794, Amelia Alderson, afterwards Opie's wife, wrote to Norwich, from London, that she had been to Marlborough Street, and found Mrs. Siddons nursing her baby (Cecilia—the sixth baby) and "as handsome and charming as ever." The unmarried lady added, "The baby is all a baby can be, but Mrs. S. laughs, and says it is a wit and a beauty already in her eyes."

Shortly after her 1782 re-entry into London, Mrs. Siddons sent Harry to Dr. Barrow's Academy in Soho Square. After a few months there, he passed, on Queen Charlotte's nomination, into the Charterhouse, where he remained five years. "Boys," observed Mrs. Siddons, speaking particularly of her second, George, afterwards the Indian Civil Servant, "are noisy creatures compared to girls." She frequently changed her daughters' schools, though keeping mostly to Bath as their locality—this was long before Mrs. Twiss opened at 24 Camden Place. In the early part of 1789, Sally and Maria were deposited by their parents at Mrs. Semple's finishing-school at Calais, where they appeared to have stayed about three years.

Thanks to their mother's genius, there was no need to train them for wage-earning. One might have said that the unoccupied existences they were allowed to lead as young, grown-up girls could not have conduced to health of body or mind, but that a sentence which occurs, in 1797, in one of Mr. Siddons's letters to Whalley, "Sally . . . has had the worst fit I ever knew, and is still very ill," suggests a reason for Mrs. Siddons's tacitly judging their already asthmatic elder daughter incapable of a professional life. A statement, singular in both senses, occurs in Mrs. Papendiek's Reminiscences, miscalled 'Journals,' to the effect that Maria was expected to appear, at Drury Lane, apparently, early in 1790 (!) as Lessing's Emilia Galotti. Mrs. Papendiek (whom Mrs. Raine Ellis well summarised as 'gossiping and credulous of gossip') goes on to allege that Maria has, previously, greatly shone, as Lessing's heroine, in Stanmore Priory theatricals, that a brilliant success was anticipated, but that

<sup>1</sup> Appendix A.

Mrs. Siddons, ostensibly on account of Maria's youthfulness and delicacy, and really from fear of being outrivalled, withdrew her daughter's name just before her début. In support of these assertions, there was, certainly, in Drury Lane announcements, of October, 1794, mention of 'a Young Lady' to play Emilia Galotti as 'her first appearance on any Stage,' but, on the other hand, this description was justified, on the night of the production, in the person of Miss Miller. Probably, Mrs. Papendiek's *canard* grew out of nothing more tangible than somebody's surmise (dimly recollected across a forty years' interval) that the 'Young Lady' might prove a Miss Siddons. The remainder of the space the 'Journals' devotes to the Siddons family is an amusing tissue of error.

Beauty both Mrs. Siddons's daughters possessed. Maria was the lovelier, but Sally's face had more of the interest of character. An enchanting trio, indeed, they and Mrs. Siddons—*filia pulchræ, mater pulchrior*—must have appeared when they entered a room together, and it cannot be wondered at that the man of the most marked artistic sensibility of any living in England at that time found his imagination enchained by this conjoint vision of grace and charm that represented the Siddons-Kemble 'type.' Thomas Lawrence, A.R.A., afterwards Sir Thomas Lawrence, P.R.A., commenced his strange, febrile relations with the Siddons family by becoming, in the first instance, the follower of Sally. Mr. Knapp's Pennington and Bird letters invalidate the order of the *data* of the Lawrence drama given in *Record of a Girlhood*. So few persons knew, at the time, what was taking place as to Lawrence's successive *volte-face* that it is small wonder that Fanny Kemble, who had no documents, and was born long after both Miss Siddons were dead, saw through a glass darkly.

Aged twenty-six, Lawrence, at about 1795, was handsome, polished, and fascinating. From the moment he settled in London, he struck at the highest quarry, and, says Mrs. Inchbald, in her plain way, "his plan demanded ample premises, which in good situations are expensive to the rising artist." He took up his quarters in Greek Street, Soho, near the Siddonses in Great Marlborough Street.

To people of to-day it is obvious how low, compared with Reynolds's level, was the level on which his over-elegant, over-facile successor painted. Lawrence's best work lies in his delicate, expressive outline drawings, as to which Elizabeth, Duchess of Devonshire, wrote to him, "I know that your drawings are finer than anything known," and it is difficult to think that the same hand drew the captivating heads of Mrs. Siddons, reproduced in Mr. Knapp's book, and, only a little later, painted the full-length of her that hangs on the staircase of the National Portrait Gallery with its too ruddy complexion, its badly hung, over-stalwart arms. What Lawrence lacked was the austerity of taste, and of mind, generally, which, by enabling a painter to govern his art, makes him great.

During his passages with the Siddons family, we see him, in some of his letters, so melodramatic, so bullying, as to recall someone's bitter opinion of Canning, viz. that he could 'never be a gentleman for more than three hours at a time.' Nevertheless, this was far from the impression Lawrence made, when out of love. People, in general, found his manners gentle, and, in spite of his obscure origin and personal pretensions, retiring rather than assertive. Benjamin Haydon's 'obituary' comment on him that he had smiled so often and so long that at last his smile had the appearance of being set in enamel is well known. Less frequently quoted is Haydon's earlier description (in a magazine article entitled 'Somniator's other Vision') of Lawrence being turned—by Michael Angelo's ghost!—into a bottle of sweet oil, whereas Northcote is transformed into a gilded viper, and Fuseli sent straight to hell. The general verdict pronounced Lawrence too suave.

He was that combination of susceptibility and attractiveness which makes a man, almost involuntarily, a flirt. He whole-heartedly desired to marry Sally Siddons, and, for her, wore mourning till his death. Yet he confessed to the Charles Kembles that he had, subsequently, been deeply in love with the beautiful Mrs. Wolff, while, when he died of ossification of the heart, still another lady put on widow's weeds for him. He was even implicated in 'the delicate investigation' con-

cerning the conduct of the Princess of Wales. "He could not write a common answer to a dinner invitation without its assuming the tone of a *billet-doux*; the very commonest conversation was held in that soft low whisper and with that tone of deference and interest which are so unusual and so calculated to please."

It would be clear that the Miss Siddons must have been in every way adequate from the fact that such a man gave them burning adoration. One all but arrives, indeed, at the conclusion that he was in love with the whole family, and the whole family with him. The works which established his reputation were portraits of the Kembles, and the last sketch he ever perfected was that of Fanny Kemble. Who can doubt that the image of Mrs. Siddons warmed his imagination from the day when, 'Æt 13,' he drew her portrait at Bath? He was fourteen years her junior, but every actress is one to two decades younger than her years. It need no more astonish us if sundry living people maintain that he was, deep down, in love with her, while supposing himself enamoured, successively, of her daughters, than that, in her day, evil thinkers invented slander to which the following reference is made, in a letter written, in 1810, by the Princess of Wales: "The report about Mrs. Siddons and Lawrence I always thought most shameful, and never believed it, and rejoice that it is proved to be false."<sup>1</sup>

When Lawrence was sixty, Fanny Kemble, then twenty, declared herself on the way to being in love with him, and, since she was a Kemble, exercised over him, in her minor measure, the old spell. "Oh! she is very like her [*i.e.* Maria]: she is very like them all," he murmured, as he gazed at the portrait he had just made of her. It is significant that, when he sent her a proof-plate of Reynolds's 'Tragic Muse,' with the inscription, "This portrait, by England's greatest painter, of the noblest subject of his pencil, is presented to her niece and worthy successor, by her most faithful humble friend and servant, Lawrence," he afterwards sent for the picture, and erased the words, "and worthy successor." His secretary told

<sup>1</sup> *Diary* [by Lady Charlotte Bury] *Illustrative of the Times of George the Fourth*, iv. 63, see also ii. 71, 1838.

Fanny that Lawrence had the print lying, with the inscription, in his drawing-room for several days before sending it to her, and had said to him, "Cover it up; I cannot bear to look at it." The most touching fact of all is that when, after years of severance (for, in spite of a few wistful letters written to him as necessary occasions arose, she did not resume the old friendly relations after Sally's death<sup>1</sup>) Mrs. Siddons felt not far from her end, she said to her brother, "Charles, when I die, I wish to be carried to my grave by you and Lawrence." "Good God! did she say that?" exclaimed Lawrence, when told. Her wish could not be fulfilled, for Sir Thomas predeceased by eighteen months her he had called 'the Immortal.'

I should have shrunk from even approaching the ground Mr. Oswald G. Knapp made his own by his admirable manipulation, in *An Artist's Love Story*, of two unpublished collections of Siddons correspondence—1797–1803—one his, the other—through him—Miss Grazebrook's gift to the public, but that, realising how incomplete the present chapter would be without much reference to them, I wrote to him, and, in reply, received the kindest permission, which Messrs. George Allen & Sons, the publishers of the book, were so good as to ratify, to avail myself of these letters. *An Artist's Love Story* tells, straight from the facts, one of those 'incredible' double dramas of family history that only occasionally, as here, reach their logical conclusion in tragedy, desperately piteous, full of the cruelty and waste of nature. It is absorbing, from the emotional intensity that breathes through every letter of these *Ames d'élite*, and no one can read it without catching some sense of that dependent affection, almost idolatry, which Mrs. Siddons inspired in her daughters and intimate friends.

During 1795, Lawrence—who, for some little time, had been attached, though not, so far, openly plighted, to Sally Siddons, then about twenty—began, by moods of alternating gloom and violence, to evince that something was wrong. At last, he confessed to Mrs. Siddons that he found he loved Maria, the bud of sixteen, better than Sally. This was a

<sup>1</sup> He was so dilatory a painter that the fact of his exhibiting the Fitzhugh full-length portrait of her in the 1804 Academy proves nothing.

painful situation for Sally, who had reciprocated his devotion, but, being a temperate, high-minded girl, the worthy daughter of her mother, she accepted the inevitable with fortitude and smiles, and, continuing to keep the fact of Lawrence's original courtship of her as much a secret from all but Mrs. Siddons and Maria as, up to the present, it was, she stood aside, while Lawrence pressed upon all concerned his zeal to become the affianced of her younger sister. It was in the nature of things that he should have his way, and, by the commencement of 1798, the engagement was sanctioned, though there were serious objections, chief among them Maria's fragility of constitution. Already, a doctor had breathed the word, consumption, as being a menace, but the family, like other families similarly threatened, had every hope that her 'youth, and the unremitting attention paid her' would conquer. Up to this time, Maria seems to have been less frequently troubled with illness than her elder sister, for Sally was subject to spasmodic asthma, and rarely free, for more than three weeks at a time, from a prostrating attack of it.

The family, as a family, was more or less pulmonary. John Kemble was badly troubled with asthma, and Sally and Maria's brother, Henry, eventually died of phthisis.

Maria had short joy of her contract. Before six weeks were out, Lawrence made it known to her, her mother, and Sally that, in spite of his former recantation, he loved Sally, and Sally alone. Perhaps, it was never the individual that swayed him, but the type. At any rate, this was his final return. Whether Maria had proved more trivial, and, therefore, less lovable, than Sally, or whether her rapidly developing malady (which had begun to necessitate, according to the coddling doctrine of the day, confinement to the house during the winter) rendered her exacting and unamusing, one cannot know.

Decorum made it impossible for Sally to give her definite, overt consent to marry the man who had now played fast and loose with them both. That she avowedly loved him two letters she wrote him, presently to be quoted, show.

With an instinctive reaching towards self-justification, she laid the unction to her soul that Maria's "heart could never

have been deeply engag'd." That the wish was here parent to the thought is evidenced by the following, in a letter from Maria herself to Miss Bird, dated March 14th:—

"I have been quite ill again. . . . I yet think I shall not live a long while . . . and I see nothing very shocking in the idea. . . . I may be sav'd from much misery . . . and in my short life I have known enough to be sick to death of it. You know I suppose the cause of too much of this misery . . . but I have determin'd to be silent."

On April 8th, commenting on the success of *The Stranger*, the poor child writes: ". . . is it not strange one should like to cry? as if there was not enough of it in reality."

At the breaking of the Maria engagement, Lawrence's visits to Great Marlborough Street ceased. In the *Nineteenth Century* of April, 1905, Lady Priestley laid open two letters Sally addressed to him during the tense period that immediately followed, and from these the editor of the *Nineteenth Century* allows me to quote. In the first, Sally wrote:—

"You cannot be in earnest when you talk of being soon again in Marlborough Street. . . . Neither you, nor Maria, nor I could bear it. Do you think that, tho' she does not love you, she would feel no unpleasant sensations to see those attentions paid to another which once were hers? Could you bear to pay them, could I endure receiving them? . . . Nobody need know what passes; from me they certainly will not. I will try to make myself easy, since my conduct is no secret to her [Mrs. Siddons] whose approbation is as dear to me as my life; but I shall have much to endure . . ."

The remark as to Sally's mother's attitude towards the complication is interesting. Mrs. Siddons has been called vacillating, and even cowardly, in her relations with Lawrence, and, no doubt, the glamour he projected, from first to last, over her imagination had much to do with her indulgence, her submissiveness towards him. Habituated as she was to the ravings of Romeos and Jaffiers, the ravings of Lawrence did not disgust her as they would have disgusted a more ordinary matron. The artist in her unfailingly went out to this other, younger, different kind of artist, a man who to herself was almost a lover. And it is difficult to see how so sympathetic a mother



MARIA SIDDONS





could, at this juncture, have denied Sally all chance of the happiness on which her heart was set, because Lawrence had, for a time,<sup>1</sup> 'mistaken his feelings' at Maria's expense. Mrs. Siddons erred in concealing from her husband Lawrence's new apostasy. She went so far as to request Mrs. Pennington, when enclosing Lawrence's letters, to address to her maid, Sally Briggs, 'lest they should fall into improper hands' [*i.e.* Mr. Siddons's].<sup>2</sup> Her pusillanimity left her too much in the power of a man whose temperament was 'artistic' rather than manly. Each partaker, indeed, in this chamber drama, with the possible exception of Sally Siddons, seems to have shared the tendency of the theatrical temperament to make much of small, and little of great issues.

In the second letter, posted on April 24th, Sally, her affection intensified by having met Lawrence the previous evening, wrote :—

" . . . I will tell you more on Thursday. Yes, I will *tell* you ; for if it is fine I mean to walk before breakfast . . . I shall be in Poland Street before nine. You have a key of Soho Square : shall we walk there ? Oh time, time, fly quickly till Thursday morning ! . . .

" . . . Have you taken your ring to Cowen's ? . . . Have they told you it is a TRUE LOVER'S KNOT ? I bought it for you, I have worn it, kissed it, and waited anxiously for an opportunity to give it you. Last night, beyond my hopes, it presented itself. You have it. Keep it, love it, nor ever part with it till *you return me my letters.*"

It had been arranged that Lawrence was to return Sally's letters should he ever love elsewhere.

Like her cousin, Fanny Arkwright, Sally was a musical composer. One of her songs, 'When Summer's burning heats arise,' is described as sweet and melancholy, and when, in 1801, Campbell made—through Charles Moore—the Siddons' acquaintance, he wrote : " Miss Siddons . . . sings with incomparable sweetness melodies of her own composition. Except our

<sup>1</sup> " Maria reign'd sole arbitress of his fate for *two years*, or more."—Mrs. Siddons to Mrs. Pennington, August 1798.

<sup>2</sup> So completely was the secret kept from relations that, when Maria died, John Kemble, believing Lawrence to be her affianced husband, devoted his leisure to comforting him.

own Scotch airs, and some of Haydn's, I have heard none more affecting or simple." Some sentences from the next paragraph of this same letter from Sally to Lawrence throw light on the inception of her talent:—

"... I never should have sung as I do had I never seen you; I never should have composed *at all*. Have I not told you that the first song I set to music was that complaint of Thomson's to the Nightingale? ... You then liv'd in my heart, in my head, in every idea. ... *You did not love me then*. But NOW! oh, mortification, grief, agony are all forgot!!!"

While these ecstasies were going on without, and while the secret lovers were pacing the Square garden in the spring morning—inside 49 Great Marlborough Street the jilted girl was beginning to die, as Allan Cunningham maintained both sisters did, 'just in the usual way of disease and doctors.' The Faculty blistered and bled her, and kept her peering out of closed windows, and feeding on her love disappointment, during the slow weeks of winter and early spring. "I long so much to go out," she wrote, "that I envy every poor little *beggar* running about in the open air ... it seems to me that on these beautiful sun-shine days all nature is reviv'd, but not me ... it appears to me that I should be *very like* myself if I could but take a walk, and feel the wind blow on me again."

Our present-day fervour of belief in out-of-door treatment for tuberculosis, and contempt of our great-grandparents' stuffy theories thereupon—which accorded with their canopied and close-curtained four-posters, their nightcaps, and their dread of bathing—make us liable to fancy that fresh air only came in with bacteriology. The following, concerning Maria Siddons, from Mrs. Piozzi, on March 27th, 1798, to Mrs. Pennington, merits attention:—

"... Shutting a young half-consumptive girl up in *one unchanged air* for three or four months would make *any* of them ill, and ill-humoured too, I should think. But 'tis *the new way* to make them breathe their own infected breath over and over again now, in defiance of old books, old experience, and good old common sense."

When July came, the Siddons family migrated, in Maria's interest, to Clifton. The invalid bore the journey well, seemed

better for the change, rode, even went to a ball. Less than a fortnight later, Mrs. Siddons departed on a professional tour in the Midlands, taking her husband and Sally with her, and leaving Maria in Dowry Square, Clifton, under the charge of the unselfish Mrs. Pennington, *née* Weston, who lived there. From Cheltenham, early in August, Mrs. Siddons wrote to Mrs. Pennington:—

“I must go dress for Mrs. Beverley—my soul is well tun’d for scenes of woe, and it is sometimes a great relief from the struggles I am continually making to wear a face of cheerfulness at home, that I can at least upon the stage give a full vent to the heart which, in spite of my best endeavours, swells with its weight almost to bursting; and then I pour it all out upon my innocent auditors.”

The psychology of the player we conventionally pity, because he

‘hides in rant the heart-ache of the night,’

is here laid bare, and one of the first of players is found describing the outward manifestation permitted to stage tragedy as ‘a great relief’ to an overfraught heart. To her, artist, primarily, as she was, in the thickest of her cares, the exercise of her art was a refuge and a safety-valve. Consciously, as well as unconsciously, she mingled her own pain with the sorrows of the part, and, thus, we cannot doubt that the loss of her two beloved girls added a further profundity to her embodiment of Constance, the bereft mother, in *King John*. She said, years afterwards, that she had never acted so well as once, ‘when her heart was heavy concerning the loss of a child.’

Up to the date when Sally left London, Lawrence had behaved rationally. At Birmingham, when Mrs. Siddons was due, on her tour, to act there, he reappeared, and, on the day ‘her sweet Sally’ was despatched to Clifton to help in nursing Maria, as to whom a disquieting bulletin had been received, he had an interview with the troubled mother. She had just heard from Mrs. Pennington that Maria was developing a fixed idea of opposition to the possibility of Sally ever marrying him. Was Maria’s attitude vindictiveness against him, we may wonder, was there subconscious jealousy in it, or was it what it professed itself—dread (which illness rendered morbid) that her sister,

dependent on such a man, must be unhappy?<sup>1</sup> Whatever Maria's motive, it seems clear that the fact was communicated by Mrs. Siddons, at this Birmingham interview, to Lawrence, whom she certainly told that Sally, in view of the desperate condition of Maria's health, now desired—with her own full concurrence—definitely to give him up, as a lover.

In response, Lawrence behaved like (the phrase is Mrs. Siddons's) a 'wretched madman.' To threaten suicide, or, as its alternative, immediate departure for Switzerland, was, with him, no new device. Actually he 'flew' to Clifton, where he lodged, under the name of Jennings, at the Bear Inn, and proceeded to bombard Mrs. Pennington with frantic letters, imploring her either to remould Maria's mind, or avert her untoward influence over Sally. Possessed by the new, alarming suggestion just opened to his view, he forgot everything but selfishness.

Kind-hearted Mrs. Pennington, deprecating his Wertherism, but enjoying the romance, granted him, on a scorching day, an out-of-door interview, whereat, after trudging backwards and forwards, 'for very Life,' in a sunny field, beside 'this torment of a man,' listening to his bluster, she was at last driven to 'flump down upon a dusty Bank' to hear him out. Concerning Mrs. Pennington, at this juncture, Mr. T. P. O'Connor has picturesquely written:—

"Here is a pretty situation for our poor fluttering chaperon; that narrow-winged, timorous, decorous hen that has to throw her wings around this tragic flock—which is not her own—with the real guardian, tall, stern, hook-nosed, brilliant-eyed, authoritative, in far-off Birmingham, enacting feigned tragedy!"

A sterner intruder than Lawrence was about to lift the latch. From this time forward, the Clifton letters become full of pulse, perspirations, cough, sleeplessness, debility, long hours of silence, emaciation, 'not one trace of even *prettiness* remaining.' Mrs. Siddons writes, in reply: "I do not flatter myself she will be long continued to me. *The Will of God be done*; but I hope, I hope she will not *suffer much*!" Regarding Sally, too, these letters report interludes of acute asthma, when nothing avails

<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, Sally, even after Maria's death, considered that her sister had been 'actuated as much by resentment for *him*, as care and tenderness for *her*.'

but laudanum, under which she lies, for the greater part of a week at a time, 'her faculties ic'd over.' But Sally recovers as rapidly as she is taken ill. On September 15th, she writes to Miss Bird :—

"I look forward to the greatest of comforts, we expect my belov'd mother in a week, and greatly as the joy of this meeting will be damp'd by poor Maria's situation, yet to me it will be the greatest comfort and happiness, if at present I could feel happy. Blest in the society and love of that best of mothers, I scarcely feel another want, but absent from her, there is a vacancy in my heart nothing else can fill. You are become better acquainted with her, my dear friend, and have overcome the prejudices which made you afraid of her. Now then you can imagine *what she must be to me*, not only the tenderest of parents, but the sweetest and most indulgent of friends, to whom my whole heart is open, and from whose sympathy and consolation I have found comfort and happiness, in moments of severe affliction. Depriv'd of every other blessing, I must still be thankful for that great blessing."

At last, on September 24th, Mrs. Siddons, who, likewise, had been counting on (and dreading) this day, was able to rejoin her children, and Maria was moved, in a sedan, from Mrs. Pennington's, into lodgings, across the square. Actors and their belongings were no less then than they are now the playthings of gossip, and, already, newspaper writers ('unfeeling Blockheads' according to Lawrence) were circling round the death-bed of Mrs. Siddons's daughter, ignorant though they were of its innermost poignancy.

One of the moving features in the story is the development and intensification of Maria's character in the school of suffering. She began, frivolous and vain, 'incapable of any exertion of mind or body,' she herself said, and her mother agreed, a spoilt younger girl, ready to take on her sister's lover without self-questioning. Only a short time after, but when she is pronounced in danger of 'a consumption,' condemned to the house, and forsaken by her lover, a new interest in the doings and feelings of others appears in her letters, as well as uncomplaining patience touching her double disorder. Only towards the end are wrung from her the words, "Think what my sufferings must be,

when I can wish to leave such a family as mine! yet I *do* wish to be released." And then, as her whole state becomes more and more abnormal, there emerges the dogged bias against Lawrence which remains with her till the last.

What, meanwhile, of Sally's attitude? How did she bear herself, set midway between the impulsive artist she loved and the dying sister he had injured, as, earlier, he had injured herself? A few words from one of Mrs. Pennington's letters to Lawrence best answers:—

"This dear Girl's Mind is as firm as her Heart is tender and affectionate. The present critical and uncommon state of circumstances in which she is placed calls forth all her energies. She is really elevated above all thoughts of Self—alive only to her duties."

October 7th, 1798, proved to be Maria's last day of existence. The letter in which, at Lawrence's express request, Mrs. Pennington conveyed to him, together with his own doom, every detail of the final twenty-four hours, is too piteous to dwell on. One extract is necessary to explain after-occurrences:—

"She desired to have Prayers read, and followed her angelic mother, who read them, and who appear'd like a blessed spirit ministering about her. She then turn'd the conversation to *you*, and said: '*That man* told you, Mother, he had destroy'd my Letters. *I* have no opinion of his honor, and I entreat you to demand them.' . . . She then said, Sally *had promised her* NEVER to think of an *union* with Mr. Lawrence, and appeal'd to her Sister to confirm it,<sup>1</sup> who, quite overcome, reply'd: '*I did not* promise, dear, dying Angel; but I WILL, and DO, if you require it.' 'Thank you, Sally; my dear Mother—Mrs. Pennington . . . lay your hands on hers' (we did so).—'You understand? bear witness.' We bowed, and were speechless; 'Sally, sacred, sacred be this promise'—stretching out her hand, and pointing her forefinger—'REMEMBER ME, and God bless you.'

"And what, after this, my friend, can you say to SALLY SIDDONS? She has entreated me to give you this detail—to say that the impression IS sacred, IS indelible—that it

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Siddons, also, we must suppose, at Clifton, was out of the room when this scene took place.



CECILIA SIDDONS





cancels all former bonds and engagements—that she entreats you to submit, and not to prophane this awful season by a murmur.”

To this letter, Lawrence, only consistent in being selfish, hurled a reply like a bardic curse. Mrs. Pennington and Mrs. Siddons termed it ‘diabolical.’ It was the cry of rage of a baffled animal, and, with Sally and her mother, injured his cause as much as the vow it protested against had done. “*It may be love,*” wrote Sally to Mrs. Pennington, “*but . . . I fly with HORROR from such a passion! I will not say that weakness shall never return . . .* We cannot, you know, quite conquer all our feelings, but . . . with the help of heaven . . . whatever I may feel I will act AS I HAVE PROMIS’D.”

Mrs. Siddons quickly returned from the dark, awful impression of untimely death to what she named ‘the siege of her affairs.’ “*Ce n’est que le travail qui guérit de vivre.*” She was no marble lady, bending over an urn. She grieved, and her grief was, as she had once honoured a friend’s for being, ‘little clamorous, solemn, simple,’<sup>1</sup> yet, in under three weeks, she was acting again. Outsiders find it a jarring fact that players resume their engagements so quickly, after occasions of mourning. It is sometimes forgotten that players think, not of the amusement side of the theatre, but of what Mrs. Siddons, just after her father’s death, termed ‘the anxiety of business.’

She now chose the part of Isabella, in *Measure for Measure*, for the touching reason that it was ‘a character that affords as little as possible to open wounds which are but too apt to bleed afresh.’ Even now, she could not face the consequences of shaking off Lawrence altogether. Perhaps, because she feared what she called ‘an eclat’ unless he were humoured, she made the certainly weak suggestion to Mrs. Pennington that the latter should promise him that Sally would become engaged to no one else.

From this time, Lawrence, as a speaking character, drops out of the Siddons domestic drama, and Sally, except by some comfortless accident, saw him no more. For awhile, he went on declaring—to the Twisses—his unalterable determination to marry her. When she did, by chance, see him, he behaved

<sup>1</sup> Whalley, ii. 22.

ungovernably. Once he wrote to her, but she answered his letter so decisively that he began to realise she was immovable. In the detached tone that, every now and then, characterised Mrs. Siddons, even in affairs of acute personal interest, she wrote, concerning her daughter, under date, November 11th, 1799: "Poor Soul, she thought, I suppose (naturally enough for her) that his adoration was to last for ever, even against Hope, and I think is rather piqued to find that 'these violent transports have violent ends.'"

Sally wore a brave face, in spite of the inner restlessness her intimate letters reveal. Though, shortly after her sister's death, she cared not if she never entered another 'crouded' assembly, she now mixed a great deal in society. She took up the successive fashions of the hour—among them, skipping. She kept up her friendly familiarity with Mrs. Inchbald's Charles Moore, that phenomenal laugh, the youngest and barrister brother of Sir John Moore, on whose distinguished family a volume might be written, tragic, too. Mrs. Mair—though, it may be, under a misapprehension—states that, at the time of her death, she was engaged to Charles. In a letter of Mrs. Siddons's we read that Sally 'had a particular regard for him,' a regard, she implies, which, had health been hers, might have ripened into marriage. There can be little doubt that Charles Moore was in love with her.

Asthma, meantime, was strengthening its grip on Sally. On January 8th, 1799, she writes, "I am . . . in tortures with that same pain in my back which returns with the slightest cold." Seven months later, she had an attack so severe as to place her life in some danger; in the following November, Mrs. Siddons was doubting whether she ought ever to go out in the evening, in winter. In January, 1801, one of Sally's letters contains this passage:—

"I sing but little now to what I did once, and indeed I think *all* my energy is weaken'd since I have ceas'd to give delight to the three beings who were dearest to me on earth; one is gone for ever, the second *is as dead to me*, and the third no longer takes the same delight in me she once did."

The last reference is to the mother in whose absence, two years later, she wrote, "home wants more than half its comforts

while she is away." Between mother and daughter, a little cloud had gradually risen, as to Lawrence. While Mrs. Siddons was still nervously warding off any likelihood of a meeting between him and 'the best beloved of her heart,' her 'adorable Sally,' she herself, acknowledging to Mrs. Pennington that 'a corner of her heart still yearned towards this unhappy creature,' and away from her house and family, renewed friendly relations with him. To the disquietude of Sally, and the disapproval of intimates acquainted with the facts, she saw him in her room at the theatre, almost every evening. But she brought home scarcely any news, and no messages. She could never clear her mind of the suspicion that Sally would—to her certain unhappiness—relent if she came under his spell. Each woman must have thought the other weaker than herself.

Things were remaining in this condition, but with Lawrence quite cooled, and cherishing little more than a memory of Sally, when, in May, 1802, her Drury Lane period finally ended, and her Covent Garden period not yet begun, Mrs. Siddons, attended by Patty Wilkinson, who had companioned her and Sally ever since Maria's death, started for Ireland on a tour of considerable duration. Sally was judged just not well enough to go. She stayed in London, with her father; her brother, George; during school holidays, little Cecy Siddons; and Dorothy Place, another girl friend almost domiciled in Great Marlborough Street.

Mrs. Siddons left home with a heavy heart. She was oppressed by a presentiment of misfortune, and, since it was natural she should fix her fears on the likeliest calamity, we find her writing to Mrs. Piozzi: "... my eyes have dwelt with a foreboding tenderness too painful, on the venerable face of my dear father, that tells me I shall look on it no more."

Summer and autumn brought her letters calculated to reassure her as to the welfare of those left behind. Sally's told of jaunts with Bertie Greatehead and Charlie Moore, a '*pic-nic*' in the Temple, Dorothy's new hat, 'a pretty cold supper,' late hours, visits to the play—"how delightfully I laughed at 'Fortune's Frolic.'" It all sounded wholesome and young. Henry Siddons's wedding took place during this same summer, and Sally sent Patty a description of how Miss Murray looked

in her travelling wedding dress, how moist people's pocket handkerchiefs were, how nervous Harry was—so nervous that he 'shook,' how, nevertheless, he "was very ready to reply, and cried out, 'I will,'" and wanted to put on the ring, before the proper time.

Mrs. Siddons's three headquarters were Dublin, Cork, and Belfast, and, in each, her popularity and profits were enormous. The profits were wanted, for, in the late autumn, 'Sid' wrote, anxious as to ways and means, and begging her to accept a Liverpool offer, unless she chose to extend her Dublin engagement. There was a long bill for the decoration of 49 Great Marlborough Street, and George needed a costly outfit for India. Upon this, the money-maker arranged to keep on in Dublin for the winter. On December 9th, the news came to her of Roger Kemble's death on the 6th. The comforting and rational promise, "Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children," was not to be fully verified to her.

In February, 1803, in Dublin, Mrs. Siddons had the—in part, heart-aching—pleasure of a fortnight's visit from her son, George, just before his departure for Bengal. "Their mutual smiles," wrote Patty Wilkinson, "were often more affecting than any tears." They never met again.

Not till almost mid-March did any suggestion reach Ireland that Sally (of whom George's news had been good) was acutely, and, this time, mortally stricken. On March 10th, Mr. Siddons wrote to Patty Wilkinson, but begged her to say nothing to alarm his wife. Patty, trusting her own judgment in preference to his, showed Mrs. Siddons the letter, and Mrs. Siddons determined to throw everything over, and hasten home. Unhappily, the gale was so contrary, that, for days, boats could not put out. A brighter report, meanwhile, arrived from 'Sid,' who—unforgivably callous, at such a juncture, in thinking solely of gain—urged Mrs. Siddons not to abandon a pending engagement at Cork. On this, she proceeded to Cork, whence she wrote to Mrs. Fitzhugh in London:—

"... Would to God I were at her bedside! ... Will you believe that I must play to-night, and can you imagine any wretchedness like it in this terrible state of mind? For a moment I comfort myself by reflecting on the strength of

the dear creature's constitution. . . . Then again, when I think of the frail tenure of human existence, my heart fails, and sinks into dejection. . . . The suspense that distance keeps me in, you may imagine, but it cannot be described."

There was no telegraph, and, in those ante-steamship, ante-railway days, Ireland was more distant from London than Seville is now. After further days of bad weather and delayed packet service, an unfavourable bulletin reached Mrs. Siddons. In contrast to her husband, her Cork Manager, Pero, showed himself sympathetic and generous regarding the breaking of his bargain, and, having settled this, she returned—in the hope of a possible sea-passage—to Dublin, where, again, she had to await a change of wind. In her anguish, she wrote to Mrs. Fitzhugh:—

"I am perfectly astonished . . . that I have not heard from you, after begging it so earnestly. . . . I cannot account for your silence at all, for you know how to feel. I hope to sail to-night, and to reach London the third day. . . . Oh God! what a home to return to . . . and what a prospect to the end of my days!"

When, at last, she had got as far on her journey as Shrewsbury, she was met by a letter which boded the worst. Two hours after Mr. Siddons wrote it, on March 24th, 1803, Sally, at the age of twenty-seven, breathed her last. She had been under the care of one of the leading doctors of the day, Sir Lucas Pepys. Her death was, in all probability, due to emphysema of the lungs, induced by the severity and frequency of her paroxysms of asthma. Immediately she was dead, some one was charged to carry the tidings to Shrewsbury. Mrs. Siddons was reading her husband's latest letter as Patty Wilkinson was called from the room. When Patty returned, she had no need to speak. Her face told all.

For a day, Mrs. Siddons lay as cold and quiet as a stone, in a state that may well have been the culmination of those 'desperate tranquillities,' that, in private, life were, she said, her way of manifesting the tragedy within.

Three months later, we find her writing to Mrs. Galindo:—

"... the inscrutable ways of providence! Two lovely creatures gone, and another is just arrived from school with

all the dazzling, frightful sort of beauty that irradiated the countenance of Maria, and makes me shudder when I look at her. I feel myself like poor Niobe grasping to her bosom . . . the last and younger of her children . . ."

This last and youngest was Cecilia, the only daughter, as George was the only son, who survived Mrs. Siddons. Cecilia, who was nine when Sally died, was Mrs. Piozzi's godchild, and named after Cecilia Thrale. Dr. Whalley was her godfather, or, as she, when little, persistently said, her 'grandfather.' In spite of the 'dazzling, frightful sort of beauty,' she was preserved to be the comfort of her mother's declining years. So faithfully did she play the home-keeping spinster princess to her mother's widowed queen that people thought the rôle absorbed her energies to an unfair extent. "Cecilia's life," wrote Fanny Kemble, "has been one enduring devotion and self-sacrifice." In an unpublished letter from George Siddons, dated Calcutta, 25th May, 1819, the writer inquires, "Is my sister likely to get a mate, or is it her resolve to die a—miss?" Six months after Mrs. Siddons's death, Cecilia, 'aged and thin,' appeared, to her cousin Fanny, to have lost the one idea of her whole life.

About eighteen months more elapsed, and, then, Cecilia, aged thirty-nine, with £15,000, married George Combe, of Edinburgh, who, till about 1837, when he retired, was a Writer to the Signet. In 1828, Combe published a book, *The Constitution of Man in relation to External Objects*, which approached in circulation to the Bible, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and *Robinson Crusoe*. We recall Fanny Kemble's statement as to 'the very decided character' of her cousin, Cecilia's, face when we read that Combe had no idea of risking matrimony until he had thoroughly examined his lady-love's head, and found her 'anterior lobe to be large, her Benevolence, Conscientiousness, Firmness, Self-esteem, and Love of Approbation amply developed; whilst her Veneration and Wonder were equally moderate with his own.' In consequence, or in spite, of these discoveries, the marriage proved happy. The phrenologist died in 1858; Cecilia died (without issue) on February 19th, 1868.

Henry, the eldest of Mrs. Siddons's children, who, after

the Charterhouse, was, like his sisters, sent to France, had an unconquerable taste for drama. At fifteen, he wrote an interlude called *Modern Breakfast*, which was acted at Mrs. Stephen Kemble's benefit. Five years later, he dramatised—and, says Genest, 'dramatised most vilely'—Anne Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance*. However poor, the piece was produced at Covent Garden. In secondhand booksellers' we may see—without feeling constrained to purchase—a work, entitled *Practical illustrations of rhetorical gesture and action, adapted to the English drama, From a work on the same subject by M. Engel, Member of the Royal Academy of Berlin. By Henry Siddons. 1807.*

*Madame Mère* strongly desired that her elder son would enter the Church, but the stage magnetised him, and, in the summer of 1801, he was acting with her in the provinces, preparatory to a winter season at Covent Garden. On October 8th, he made his first London appearance, as the hero of *Integrity*, a comedy newly adapted from the German. Ever diffident and nervous, young Siddons is said to have begged the speaker of the prologue to intercede with the audience in his favour, but this was refused. Strengthened by his name, he made a tolerably successful début. The letters his mother wrote, at the time, to Mrs. Inchbald and Mrs. Fitzhugh are touching in their anxiety and would-be pride, combining with prescience, mute, but manifest, that Harry would never become great.

As a matter of fact, the 'Stranger' was the only part he personated with success, and that because it suited his own disposition, for, as Mrs. Siddons observed, he had 'a fine, honorable, but alas! melancholy character.' He possessed too little self-confidence, or, perhaps, as some one said, too fine a contexture of nerve. Upon finding him described as deficient 'in his voice, form, and face,' the commentator may question whether the force of deficiency could go farther. Galt, when quite young, saw Harry play *Macbeth*, at Durham, to the Lady *Macbeth* of Mrs. Siddons, and noted:—

"Through all the performance she spoke as it were in a suppressed voice, that seemed to lend additional poetry to the text. I afterwards, however, suspected that it was accidental. Henry Siddons, her son, who performed *Macbeth*, was not a



judicious actor; his emphasis was too boisterous, and it might be that she assumed the undertone . . . from a desire to moderate his loud vehemence; at least, I never heard her speak in the same key again."

Harry married a great-granddaughter of that John Murray of Broughton who, after being Prince Charles Edward's Secretary, became 'Mr. Evidence Murray.' The marriage was happy, Harriet Murray was an agreeable actress, and we need only to consult the first volume of *Record of a Girlhood* to find what sunshine she diffused in her home. None of the Harry Siddons' three children took to acting. When they were little, Grandmother Siddons was going to play *Coriolanus*, in Edinburgh, and wanted to bring them (as one of them, when Mrs. Mair, long afterwards remembered) on the stage, but their father would not consent.

It was owing to Walter Scott's cordiality that, in 1809, Siddons became lessee and Manager of the New Theatre Royal, Edinburgh, and we may guess Scott's enthusiasm when his friend's son produced, as his first new play, Joanna Baillie's *The Family Legend*, propped by Mrs. Siddons. "Siddons is a good lad," he told Joanna Baillie, "and deserves success." Even this warm backer could not away with Harry's own play, produced in March, 1810—"it was such a thing as if I or you had written it . . . would have been damned seventyfold," he wrote to Miss Baillie.

On April 12th, 1815, while still Edinburgh Manager, Harry Siddons died, of consumption, at forty-one. He left, said his mother, "a sphere of painful and anxious existence with which he was ill calculated to struggle." Mr. Leigh permits me to reproduce an unpublished letter (facing p. 218), addressed by Mrs. Siddons to Mrs. Piozzi, shortly after his death. It is a letter that shows an already venerably resigned attitude towards

'Death the Skeleton  
And Time the Shadow,'

and shows, too, Mrs. Siddons's power of writing nobly.

Though she bore calamities with the equal mind of some Cornelia of old, none the less she felt them.

In 1803, or late in 1802, her consistent patron, the Prince

of Wales, gave her second son, George Siddons, an Indian cadetship, and, almost immediately after, a writership, which, in the interval, fell vacant. I have before me a sheet of voluminous MS. letters, the property of Mr. Horace Twiss, that were written by George, from Sumatra and Calcutta, to his cousin 'Nol' (Horace) Twiss. The ingrained Civilian, with his Anglo-Indian jests, grievances, conventional propriety, stoicism, and home-sickness, speaks through them. George became Collector of Calcutta Government Customs, and married a lady who, on one side, derived her blood from the Kings of Delhi.

India was destined to absorb an extraordinary number of Mrs. Siddons's descendants. In *Notes and Queries*, for January 1st, 1887, appeared a letter from the late Colonel H. G. F. Siddons, George Siddons's grandson, which showed that the Siddons race was, then, in no immediate danger of ceasing to obey the Divine injunction to replenish the earth. The courtesy of the Editor of *Notes and Queries* enables me to quote from this interesting document, as follows:—

" . . . Sarah Siddons (the *tragédienne*) left three children who married, namely, Henry, George, and Cecilia.

"Of these, Henry married Miss Murray, and left issue (*a*) Henry Siddons, of the Bengal Engineers, who married his cousin, Harriott Siddons (below named), and left one child, Sarah Siddons, now living, unmarried. (*b*) Sarah, who married William Grant, of Rothiemercus, and left no issue. (*c*) Elizabeth, who married Major Mair, of Edinburgh, and left a son and four daughters.

"Mrs. Siddons's second son, George, of the Bengal Civil Service, married Miss Fombelle, and left issue (*a*) Frances, who married Professor Horace Wilson, and left six daughters. (*b*) George Siddons, of the Bengal Cavalry, who left one child, Mary, married to J. Hawtrey, and now living. (*c*) Harriott, who married her cousin, Henry Siddons, and left one child, Sarah Siddons, above named. (*d*) Sarah, who married William Young, of the Bengal Civil Service, is now living, and has two sons and two daughters. (*e*) Henry Siddons, of the Madras Cavalry, who left one child, Henry Siddons (the undersigned), now living, married. (*f*) William Siddons, of the Bengal Native Infantry, who left four children, all now living, namely, Mary

Scott Siddons, who married, but resumed the name; Harriott Siddons, unmarried; William Siddons of the Bengal Uncovenanted Service, who is married and has two daughters; and Henry Siddons, unmarried. (g) Mary, who married Robert Thornhill, of the Bengal Civil Service, and was killed at Cawnpore, leaving two sons and one daughter. . . .

HENRY G. F. SIDDONS

Major, Royal Artillery

Liverpool "

## XV

### FRIENDS

A PART my heroine admirably sustained, that of *Mrs. Siddons*, she enacted before two widely contrasted generations. Her early approver, Dr. Johnson, passed away with the year 1784, and the eighteenth century died with him. A short silence fell, and then,

"Scattering the past about,  
Comes the new age"

—a wigless age, presided over by Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Byron.

The reserve, the shut-up-ness occasional observers deprecated in Mrs. Siddons disappeared when she was with the few people outside her family to whom she was genuinely attached. We have seen how warm were her expressions of affection towards the Whalleys. Another person she admitted into full confidence was Hester Lynch Piozzi, whom she addressed as 'my beloved friend' and 'dear soul,' while Mrs. Piozzi, in return, referred to her as 'dear Siddons,' 'charming Siddons.' When, in 1782, Mrs. Piozzi, then Mrs. Thrale, first met the actress, she said, in her crisp way, to her 'Tyo,' alluding to Mrs. Siddons's heavy manner, "This is a leaden goddess we are all worshipping! however, we shall soon gild it." Sober-sided, deliberate Mrs. Siddons and volatile, berouged Mrs. Thrale only became intimate after the latter was married ('ignominiously married,' Johnson, after the event, absurdly told her) to Piozzi. Mrs. Siddons did not expect to care much for Mrs. Piozzi, she told Lady Harcourt, in 1790, but an unexpectedly prolonged stay of three weeks at Streatham completely won her. Concerning *her*, Mrs. Piozzi wrote, in

1801, "the longer one knows that incomparable creature the more reasons spring up to esteem and love her." The two ladies were complementary to each other, rather than obviously sympathetic. Johnson's Thralia—to quote Mr. Birrell's phrase—was the older in years, Mrs. Siddons in temperament.

The Miss Thrales appear to have been the last visitors admitted to Maria Siddons before she died, and Lawrence, who was resenting everything, hated to hear of the descent upon the sick-room of these 'mannish women,' with their crass glances and 'shock'd' inquiries. Their mother, with her tact of discernment, foresaw that Mr. Siddons's grief over Maria's death would be deeper-seated and more corroding than Mrs. Siddons's.

Of all the people with whom Mrs. Siddons, in her earlier days, was intimately thrown, Mrs. Inchbald was the most interesting. She possessed far more personality than she could distil even into nineteen plays and that still captivating novel, *A Simple Story*. As an actress, she was, naturally, beside Mrs. Siddons, 'a waxen taper in the solar blaze.' There is a well-known story as to how, coming off the stage, one evening, she was about to sit next Melpomene in the greenroom, when, suddenly, looking at her, she exclaimed, "No, I won't s-s-s-sit by you; you're t-t-t-too handsome!" In her curiously unoffending candour resided a great deal of pretty, freckled Mrs. Inchbald's peculiar charm. The Kembles and Twisses all loved her, and addressed her as 'dear Muse.' Lamb spoke of her as the only endurable clever woman he had ever known.

When Mrs. Inchbald had turned hardworking authoress, and Mrs. Siddons was moving among social stars of the first magnitude, occasional complaints were made of the latter's giving little to her 'old' friends save 'recollections.' Such complaints did not necessarily convict her of worldliness. "You know too well what a hurried life mine is, to need apology for this hasty, almost unintelligible scrawl," she wrote, on one occasion, and, with what she might well call, in writing to Mrs. Pennington, her 'numerous claims,' it was equally impossible for her to see the same persons often. At another time, we find her begging Whalley to 'impute anything to her

rather than suppose that any earthly circumstance of wealth, or honour, or grandeur, or any other nonsense of the kind, could abate her esteem and love' for him and Mrs. Whalley.

The strongest impression derivable from Boaden's mostly twaddling 'Memoirs' of Mrs. Inchbald is that of her life-long, self-denying frugality, which seemed uncalled for, in view of her considerable literary earnings. Frequent investments in the Reduced Annuities and Long Annuities were her sole personal luxuries. On the other hand, she was ceaselessly liberal to very unsatisfactory sisters—there was nothing in relation to her thriving, but herself, says her biographer. Through all her battles, she preserved her capacity for 'larkiness.' Aged thirty-five, she enters in her journal, "On the 29th of June (Sunday) dined, drank tea, and supped with Mrs. Whitfield. At *dark*, she and I and her son William walked out. I rapped at doors in New Street and King Street and ran away." Nothing sayable in few words, descriptively, as to Mrs. Inchbald would render her as clearly 'seen' as a couple of extracts from her letters. To her friend, Mrs. Phillips, she indited this caustic aphorism:—

"I think, in your determinations concerning your children, you do not sufficiently consider . . . how much more than upon all your poor efforts for their welfare, their success will depend upon chance. Still, do the best you can; and then call that chance by the name of Providence, and submit to it."

Touchingly, and freshly, in one of her later letters, she wrote: "It is only in the promises of the Gospel that I can ever hope to be *young* and *beautiful* again."

One of Mrs. Richmond Ritchie's 'sibyls,' Mrs. Opie, was a fervent friend of Mrs. Siddons's, though, after she left 8 Berners Street, upon Opie's death, in 1807, and resettled with her father in Norwich, there, later, to become a dove-grey, always pleasantly coquettish, Quakeress, she only saw her London intimates when she made those periodic descents of hers into the metropolitan whirlpool which suggest to the reader of her letters a vegetarian convert's lapses in the direction of *suprêmes de volaille*. Mrs. Inchbald thought Mrs. Opie cleverer than her books, which may well have been the case. The long list of her lovers and friends makes it clear

that she was a delightful creature to be with. In 1798, John Opie, R.A., became her husband. Mrs. Siddons used to say, "I like to meet Mr. Opie; for then I always hear something I did not know before." Opie's (see illustration to face p. 184) is the only portrait of William Siddons that has rewarded a diligent search.

Opie's widow testified how warm had been her regard for Mrs. Siddons, when—after the death of the latter—being shown, in Sir John Soane's Museum, a plaster life cast (curiously open-lipped) from the retired actress's face that still hangs there, she broke into a passion of tears.

Another friend of Mrs. Siddons's was that woman-souled and man-minded little lady, Joanna Baillie. Drama was Miss Baillie's star, and she was dreaming of Mrs. Siddons when she wrote *De Montfort*. The description of Jane de Montfort's appearance, in Act II. Scene I, is a description of the actual Mrs. Siddons's in 1800:—

*Lady.*—How looks her countenance?

*Page.*—So queenly, so commanding, and so noble,  
I shrunk at first in awe; but when she smil'd,  
For so she did to see me thus abash'd,  
Methought I could have compass'd sea and land  
To do her bidding.

*Lady.*—Is she young or old?

*Page.*—Neither, if right I guess; but she is fair:  
For Time hath laid his hand so gently on her,  
As he too had been aw'd.

*Lady.*—Is she large in stature?

*Page.*—So stately and so graceful is her form,  
I thought at first her stature was gigantic;  
But on a near approach I found, in truth,  
She scarcely does surpass the middle size  
as she moves  
Wide flows her robe in many a waving fold,  
As I have seen unfurled banners play  
With a soft breeze."

Though *De Montfort* failed to grip the public, Mrs. Siddons naturally loved the glorified herself that was her part in it. "Make me some more Jane de Montforts!" she said to Joanna Baillie.

In her *Recollections of the Past*, Mrs. Mair preserves the record of a religious correspondence that passed between

Joanna Baillie and Mrs. Siddons, in later life. The former had seen cause to modify her early view on some minor tenets of orthodoxy, a fact she thought it right to communicate to so near a friend. Mrs. Siddons received the news of the changes in her outlook, not uncharitably, but with the characteristic parenthesis, "I still hold fast my own faith without wavering."

Hannah More's is a name which, particularly during its bearer's mundane first period, belonged to the Garrick circle. At several points, later, it impinged on the orbit of Sarah Siddons. The lady whom, in 1781, Mrs. Garrick called her Chaplain, resembled Mrs. Opie in becoming, as time went on, more avowedly 'strict.' By 1787, she refused to go to see her own tragedy, *Percy*, when it was revived, even with that paragon of decorum, Mrs. Siddons, as its heroine. From letters included in their respective biographies we find that Mrs. Siddons's 'affectionate friend, Hannah More,' used to send her copies of her works, and further 'encourage and cheer' her way (the quoted words are Mrs. Siddons's) 'to the better world.'

"I have heard," Miss More wrote to her, from Barley Wood, in 1811, "that you consider the Bible as your treasure. May it continue to be your guide through life, and your support in that inevitable hour which awaits us all. It has pleased God to bless my little book [probably, a new edition of *Sacred Dramas*] with a degree of success which I had no reason to expect."

Anna Seward burnt voluminous incense before Mrs. Siddons. With a letter, inviting her, on her way from Birmingham, to stay a few days at Lichfield, or, in Sewardian diction, entreating the honour of the Siddons sleeping beneath her roof, she enclosed a twelve-lined sonnet (addressed by the Same to the Same) which had 'descended,' she said, that morning, 'from her pen.'

"Behold, dividing still the palm of Fame,  
Her radiant Science, and her spotless Life!"

thus, for an inflated 'Swan,' rather neatly, she wound up the lines. The Swan of Lichfield came, at times, so perilously



near writing herself down its goose, that we are apt to under-value sound and shrewd observations that, betweenwhiles, 'descended'—to employ again her mountebank phraseology—from her tireless pen and tongue.

Like Joanna Baillie, Maria Edgeworth, and other ladies of original minds and irreproachable morals, Mrs. Siddons visited at the house of Sir Ralph and Lady Noel Milbanke (afterwards Noel), and became interested in their reticent, almond-eyed daughter, "almost the only young, pretty, well-dressed girl we ever saw who carried no cheerfulness along with her."<sup>1</sup> To Mrs. Siddons, at the close of 1814, Annabel Milbanke wrote to announce her engagement to Byron, and her letter, noted Mrs. Siddons's granddaughter, Mrs. Mair, who owned it, was 'so full of hope that the results which so soon followed seemed sad indeed.' The best sympathetic account of Lady Byron—the Lady Annabel Herbert of Disraeli's *Venetia*—to be met with forms one of Harriet Martineau's 'Biographical Sketches' (1868). Lady Byron had strong private-life admiration for Mrs. Siddons, and, with Lady Noel, both visited her, and was visited by her at the Noels' house at Kirkby Mallory, Leicestershire.

Of all Mrs. Siddons's friends, the most adoring was Mrs. William Fitzhugh. She was a sister of the William Hamilton who rescued the Rosetta Stone from the French, shipped the Elgin Marbles for England, and became the official successor, after an interval of twenty-two years, of a better known namesake at the court of Naples. For years, Mrs. Fitzhugh played henchwoman to Mrs. Siddons. In London, she tried to be with her all day, and spent the evening in her dressing-room at the theatre. She corresponded incessantly with her, and never willingly let a year pass without entertaining her at her husband's place, Bannister Lodge, near Southampton. From there, in 1803, Mrs. Siddons wrote to the Galindos: "... My dear Mrs. Fitzhugh grudges every moment that I am not by her side." For her was painted Lawrence's 'handsome dark cow' whole-length of Mrs. Siddons reading *Paradise Lost*, which Mrs. Siddons, strange to say, thought

<sup>1</sup> *The Literary Life of the Rev. William Harness*. By the Rev. A. G. L'Estrange, 23. 1871.

'more really like' her 'than anything that has been done.' The portrait was in the Bannisters dining-room, where Fanny Kemble used to sit under it, when she, in her turn, went there on visits to 'comical old . . . Mrs. F—— a not very judicious person,' and 'Mrs. F——'s' daughter, Emily, who was Fanny's great friend. To Mrs. Fitzhugh were committed Mrs. Siddons's 'Remarks' on Lady Macbeth, and by her they were handed over to Campbell, for inclusion in the official biography. Mrs. Fitzhugh's husband sat in five Parliaments for Tiverton. In the following unpublished letter (placed at my disposal by Mr. Horace Twiss) Mrs. Siddons is endeavouring to make the most of his interest on behalf of her nephew. A true aunt's letter, its recommendation of 'Self esteem' is a delightful Kemble touch:—

"[1809?] *Sunday night, Twelve o'clock*

"MY DEAR HORACE,—I have had a great deal of talk with Mr. F: about you, and whatever it is, that is in meditation I am quite sure that *his report* will be favourable; I pray God that it may be efficacious! You will be invited to dinner soon and I need not suggest to you to remember (with modesty and sobriety) that 'oftimes nothing profits more than Self esteem grounded on just and right.'

"You know my dear Horace how much your honor and welfare interest me and therefore you will excuse me for desiring you to remember that Mr. Fitzhugh is a wise, Steady-headed man, and I should imagine him very likely to take disgust at any little flippancy or frivolity that a thousand others would overlook and excuse as the overflowing of youthful spirits, And 'oh reform it altogether.'

"God bless and prosper you!

S. S.

"Mrs. F. still insists that she has often asked you to call, and mentioned particularly, having done so when she met you one evening at Mrs. Opie's.—when I told her I was sure some mistake must have prevented you from availing yourself of what I was quite sure you would receive as an honor and a gratification—She said the servants were so negligent that it was not impossible that you *might* have called, and they having mislaid your Card, and *you* finding no notice taken of your visit, had naturally thought no more about it.—I said it was very likely to be so—And so now you may call or not as seems best to your own feeling."

A better known name in the list Campbell gives of persons he saw oftenest at Mrs. Siddons's, during her last fifteen years, is that of Sir George and Lady Beaumont. A prominent picture collector, a member of the Society of Dilettanti, a man to be thought of with Lock of Norbury, and Hope of 'the Deep Dene,' himself an amateur artist of taste, albeit obsessed by his 'brown tree,' Sir George Beaumont is best entitled to remembrance because, had he never painted his picture of Peele Castle, in a Storm, we might have missed one of the most beautiful of English poems. No less than ten of the outpourings of Wordsworth's muse are concerned either with Beaumont or his domain at Coleorton, Leicestershire. A collateral descendant of the dramatist of his name, Sir George had an innate love of drama, and we understand the attraction that led him to Mrs. Siddons's house, when we read (in Wordsworth's 'Elegiac Musings' over his departed friend's diffident, self-chosen epitaph)<sup>1</sup> how he could give, in reading Shakespeare to a circle,

' with eye, voice, mien,  
More than theatric force to Shakspeare's scene.'

We have seen how little cause Mrs. Siddons had to like the waspish Steevens. Another editor of Shakespeare, of whose friendship she was, on the contrary, proud, was Edmond Malone, and of his strongly contrasted 'elegance' (*i.e.* suavity) of manner both she and Kemble used to talk admiringly.

In Campbell's list of the *habitués* of Mrs. Siddons's drawing-room we find the name of the Rev. Sydney Smith—whom Amelia Opie called the ever welcome. It is pleasant to know that the hostess's renowned seriousness was no repelling force for the rational, benevolent, and gladsome Dr. Anti-Cant who said that 'the gods do not bestow such a face as Mrs. Siddons' on the stage more than once in a century.' In an 'Edinburgh' of 1809, we find Sydney Smith less informally lauding her, in her public capacity, in these words: "Where is every feeling more roused in favour of virtue than at a good play? Where is goodness so feelingly, so enthusiastically learnt? What

<sup>1</sup> "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, O Lord!"

My dear friend

You were always kind and good to me, and I thank you most sincerely for this last proof of your affection. - My affection is deep indeed, but I do not borrow it from those who have no hope" - I doubt not that I shall be wise and good and order all things for the ultimate happiness of his friends and my grief for the loss of my dear and ever delicate and affectionate son is greatly

To  
Mrs. Piozzi  
Bath

shortened in the humble hope that his exemplary virtue will find acceptance at the throne of mercy thro' the mediation of our helpful Saviour. This kind notice has ever helped Lady Sicken me "I cannot but remark how such things move, that were most precious to me" - So strange and unlooked for are all things around us, that the only good thing we can reckon upon with any certainty in this world is, that one is far advanced upon one journey to a better.

I am My dear friend

Yours faithfully  
J. P. Piozzi



so solemn as to see the excellent passions of the human heart called forth by a great actor, animated by a great poet? To hear Siddons repeat what Shakspeare wrote?" The first time Sydney Smith met Mrs. Siddons, he amused her so much that she, albeit unused to the shaking mood, threw herself back, and laughed so heartily and lengthily, "that it made quite a scene, and all the company were alarmed."

Among Mrs. Siddons's regular callers was the chartered punster, Joseph Jekyll. Jekyll's wit, said Rogers, was of the kind which amused only for a moment. He cited, in proof, that when the eccentric and kleptomaniac Lady Cork (erstwhile, the Hon. Mary Monckton and Dr. Johnson's dearest dunce) appeared in an enormous plume, Jekyll remarked, 'she was exactly a shuttlecock—all *cock* and feathers.' Among the tea-cups and wax lights of one of Lady Cork's parties, Mrs. Siddons and Jekyll first met, and Campbell gives a sparkling letter from the latter to the former, referring to the occasion, in terms that must have been strained, since they adumbrate his correspondent as a queen of banter.

William Harness, Vicar of All Saints', Knightsbridge, was a familiar friend of the Kemble group, especially of Mrs. Siddons. He edited Shakespeare, and, after his death, a memorial to his memory took the form of a prize founded at Cambridge for the study of Shakespearean literature. He was one of that ever winning type of clergymen who avowedly take the optimist view of the world and life. *Dilexit multum.*

Byron's first words to Harness, then a pale little newcomer to Harrow, were, "If any fellow bullies you, tell me; and I'll thrash him if I can." We are bound to love Harness because he loved Byron, and, unlike Lady Byron, knew how to manage him, and bring out his best. "There can be no doubt," said he, "that Byron was a little 'maddish.'"

Among the more distinguished of Mrs. Siddons's admirers was the Hon. Thomas Erskine, afterwards Baron Erskine and Lord Chancellor. His dates (1750-1823) nearly synchronise with hers, and a letter, signed A B, in the *Courier* of August 26th, 1823, states, on one knows not what authority, that Tom Erskine 'and a few literary friends at the bar' were instrumental in her removal from Bath, in 1782, back to the

wider sphere of Drury Lane. Fanny Burney has told how Erskine 'boomed' Mrs. Siddons—and in Mrs. Siddons's presence—at Miss Monckton's, in 1782, talking, across her, of her artistic excellences. He was, at all events, so much more tactful in praise than the surrounding 'blues,' that Mrs. Siddons, in her account of this Sunday evening menagerie, described his 'benevolent politeness' as a relief and deliverance from the other guests' cruder lionisation.

Few men, belonging to the modern world, have had a more meteoric career than Erskine, and more forcibly dominated people and circumstances by sheer cleverness. It was no lesser leaf in our actress's laurel crown of eulogies from the great that this incomparable advocate, whose 'little twelvers' in the jury-box found it, said Brougham, impossible to look away from him when once riveted by his glance and first word, should have declared that from Mrs. Siddons he learnt his effective cadences and modulations of voice.

A story told by Whalley further associates Erskine's name with Mrs. Siddons's. One evening, in the Brussels theatre, during the winter of 1786-87, Whalley, fresh from reading Lavater, was gazing at the faces round, 'by Lavater's rules.' His physiognomic interest presently became concentrated on a gentleman, who, taking a place by him, began talking to him, in French, of the stage generally, and, before long, of Mrs. Siddons. Whalley observed—

"that she shone [it was his happy illusion] both in tragedy and in comedy, and that she was not only eminent on the stage, but irreproachable in her private character, elegant in her address, and in her conversation showed a fine and cultivated understanding. They both agreed that it was not common for persons so to shine in different stations and accomplishments, although there was indeed, said Mr. Whalley, an instance of the same person shining in *different* professions (navy, army, and law)—the English Erskine. 'Erskine?' said the gentleman; 'I am Erskine!'"

By an incident, conveying rich indications to the Comic Spirit (as defined by George Meredith), Mrs. Siddons suddenly became, not only a friend, but, in the phrase of 'George Paston,' a 'Mascotte,' to impracticable, fighting Haydon.

Haydon, so much more salient a writer than a painter, gives the incident in his autobiography, where it forms the culmination of his story of a desperate artist's hopes, fears, and preparations for making known what he believed his masterpiece. This was *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem*, exhibited, in 1820, at the Egyptian Hall, as a one-man, and one-picture, show. Every occurrence, even in the hanging of the picture, is given in Haydon's intense narration. Duns were pressing, patrons weary, Academy folk hostile, or cold. At last, the critical Saturday, Private View Day, arrived. During the earlier morning, the artist went into the Egyptian Hall, and, to his mortification, found no one but the attendants. When, at half-past twelve, he stole in again, and heard that Sir William Scott had been in, his spirits revived. "He always brings everybody." By half-past three, there was a steady stream of the society world, and Haydon (after two glasses of sherry) hastened inside, mingling with 'princes of the blood, bishops, and noblemen.' From the Persian Envoy, who exclaimed, "I like the elbow of soldier," everybody praised something. But, as yet, no definite opinion was to be heard on the 'unorthodox' chief figure. In the middle of the afternoon, *Enter Mrs. Siddons*.

A silence fell on the crowd, while the still magnificent-looking woman—'like a Ceres or a Juno,' says Haydon—contemplated the picture. Then, Sir George Beaumont timidly asked her, "How do you like the Christ?" and everybody waited. After a moment, she said, in her deep, distinct voice, "It is completely successful." At this, Haydon was presented, and, in the same tones, she added, now speaking to him, "The paleness gives it a supernatural look." Simple words, but they turned the scale. They were repeatable. The success of the exhibition was secured. It is, in passing, interesting to find that Mrs. Siddons's prestige—her glamour in the eyes of society—so long outlasted her retirement from the stage.

Haydon wrote his delighted gratitude to Mrs. Siddons (whom he addressed as 'great high priestess at the shrine of Nature') and, in reply, received a pressing invitation to call. Thus, he describes the visit:—



"It was like speaking to the mother of the gods. I told her when a boy I had crept below the orchestra door at Plymouth theatre, and squeezed up underneath the stage box . . . to see her perform the Mother in Lillo's 'Cornish Tragedy.' She was pleased."

Afterwards, he besought 'the mother of the gods' to come, whenever a picture of his was 'exhibiting.' In 1846, he was buried where he had buried his children, near the grave of Mrs. Siddons in Paddington 'new' churchyard. His life had been, in Mrs. Browning's phrase, 'one long agony of self-assertion.'

Thomas Campbell, introduced to Mrs. Siddons by Charles Moore, became the favourite friend of her declining years. In spite of the sloppiness and omissions of his 'Life' of her, and although Mrs. Mair found he 'had lost the power of reproducing, what long intimacy should have enabled him to do,' our knowledge of Mrs. Siddons, especially during her latest period, would be very considerably less, lacking his personal memories.

In P. G. Patmore's *My Friends and Acquaintance* it is stated that Campbell never did more for the *Life of Mrs. Siddons*, nominally his, than 'overlook the manuscript' and 'look over the proof-sheets.' This statement was, to an extent, disproved by a correspondence between Campbell and the Rev. Thomas Price, published in the 'Literary Remains' of the latter. 'The poet Campbell' took a considerable amount of trouble over a task he performed in heaviness. Always a man of laborious finish, by 1832 his dilatoriness had become a vice. Also, the lapse of time had dimmed the impression of the elastic day, when, as Mrs. Mair records, he was heard suddenly to say to her grandmother, "O what a privilege it would be to be allowed to write your life," and Mrs. Siddons's reply was, "Then you shall do it." Campbell, certainly, tried, at the end of 1832, to engage J. P. Collier to collaborate with him, but Collier, scenting much work in the proposal and seeing little profit—Campbell offered £100—refused.

Kemble origins and his heroine's early circumstances especially worried—as Campbell says, 'distressed'—him, and his quest after something to fill his first chapter led him into

two or three of those operose excursions into the needless of which our grandsires were so much more tolerant in books than we are. About eleven weeks after Mrs. Siddons's death, the author of *Hohenlinden* opened a correspondence with that amiable Vicar of Crickhowel who to the vulgar was known as Thomas Price, but Carnhuanawc in the world of Bards. Campbell told Price that he was 'obliged at Mrs. Siddons's bequest to write a memoir,' and that he was graveled for lack of matter relating to Brecon. Regarding birthplace, he inquired,

"The family of the Kembles cannot inform me in what particular house or street of the town she was born—Is any tradition respecting her preserved in the place? . . . Something is whispered about her having been born in a house most vulgarly called the haunch of mutton."

To this and further inquiries Campbell's 'learned Cambrian friend' sent an ample reply, and enclosed a drawing (facing p. 2) of Mrs. Siddons's birth-house, as he could remember it before it was rebuilt.

In his exhilaration at raking in so much stuff to spread over his pages, Campbell "felt as if he had known" his correspondent "twenty years." He went on to describe himself as 'Mrs. Siddons's biographical undertaker,' which sounds like an adverse augury for what he wished, he said, to make 'a light popular book.' Three months later, he was still in pursuit of copy for the first chapter, and, by that time, had run down the Catholic martyr, Father Kemble, as to whose end he only wished he could prove he had been burnt, and not hanged.

When her daughters were marriageable, and even earlier, Mrs. Siddons gave evening parties. Thus, in 1791, she "did the honours of her house to fifty people, till near 2 in the morning," and, twice, during 1805, Mrs. Inchbald was her guest at a dinner, followed by a rout.<sup>1</sup> In Mr. Hardy's drama of nations, *The Dynasts*, in the scene at Windsor, after the doctors have visited King George in his padded room, Sir Henry Halford breaks up their consultation with the words, "I want to get back to town. . . . Mrs. Siddons has

<sup>1</sup> Inchbald, ii. 80. Mrs. Inchbald usually dined with the Siddonses on Christmas Day.

a party at her house at Westbourne to-night, and all the world is going to be there." Merely predatory lion-hunters Mrs. Siddons avoided—like 'Dictionary Johnson'—with animus, but she delighted to consort with people with ideas.

In her intervals of leisure, she stayed a great deal at 'seats.' Half her letters seem dated from this Park or t'other Rectory. Seven successive Christmases were spent with the Earl and Countess of Arran, at Arran Lodge, Bognor; at the Earl of Darnley's, at Cobham Hall, where she conversed with Prince Leopold and H.R.H. the Duchess of Kent, her seventy-second birthday was (too fatiguingly for her) celebrated with Shakespearean and musical honours, and twenty-three people at dinner. All this was gratifying, yet one feels convinced that, with her deep feeling for association and her sentiment of continuity, the house in which she loved best to recruit (in Campbell's phrase) her impaired stamina was Guy's Cliffe, 'that truly charming, and to me uncommonly interesting place,' as she called it.

The last entry for 1809 in Windham's Diary is as follows: "Dr. Ferris . . . sent over . . . Mrs. Galindo's 'Letters'; a foolish slander, as it seems, against Mrs. Siddons." Though Mrs. Siddons's entire circle, and all other people of sense, took the same view as Windham, *l'Affaire Galindo* caused Mrs. Siddons so much vexation, that, small and base in itself, it has to be described, and, perhaps, both to biographer and reader, may be allowed one passing gleam of wicked gratification at its disclosure of a sporadic vanity and obtuseness in one so generally impeccable as 'S. Siddons.'

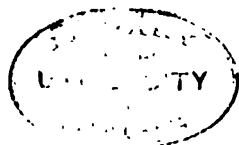
In 1809, appeared a pamphlet, bearing, for title, *Mrs. Galindo's letter to Mrs. Siddons: being a circumstantial detail of Mrs. Siddons's life for the last seven years; with several of her letters*. The pamphlet was no less than an allegation of misconduct on the part of Mrs. Siddons and Mrs. Galindo's husband. It proved nothing beyond the irresponsible and violent nature of its writer.

In a career, relatively, most tranquil, Mrs. Siddons had, before 1809, already weathered a number of accusations. As she said in 1786, she stood 'some knocks with tolerable

firmness.' But the venomous Galindo pamphlet embodied a new order of calumny. It was an attack upon the 'character' of a woman whose 'character' was her crown and ægis, a woman with whom a man could no more fall guiltily in love than with the Decalogue, a woman whose presence was as instant a check on loose behaviour as Lady Elizabeth Hastings's, a woman who had delivered to the madcap who, one night, boarded her carriage as she was leaving the theatre, the restorative, if somewhat blatant, caution, "Mr. Sheridan, I trust that you will behave with all propriety; if you do not, I shall immediately let down the glass, and desire the servant to show you out." And, now, 'the Majestic Siddons, to whom none dared express admiration' (I quote the words of a contemporary Drury Lane player), in the autumn of her beauty, large, august, and matronly, was categorically charged with having caused red ruin in the home of Mrs. Galindo, a minor *tragédienne*, known as Miss Gough—'sepulchral Gough,' Croker called her in his youthful verses on Dublin performers.

Galindo, described as a personable, fine-limbed man, young enough to be Mrs. Siddons's son, was a fencing-master, in Bath. When his wife secured an engagement at the Crow Street Theatre, he moved with her to Dublin, and, during the earlier stage of the affair, he and she were living there, in Leinster Street, with their young family, and keeping a curricule and pair. We need not believe, with the author of a tract, entitled *Strictures on Mrs. Galindo's Curious Letter to Mrs. Siddons*, that the behaviour of the Galindos was a plot on their part for the purpose of raising the wind, though the fact that Mrs. Galindo charged five shillings for her pamphlet of eighty pages looks as though she expected from it the harvest of a scandalous success.

During Mrs. Siddons's Irish engagements of 1802-3, when the intimacy commenced, as well as later, when she was, temporarily, at Hampstead, and the Galindos had come to London, in anticipation of the Covent Garden engagement she had promised Mrs. Galindo, she undoubtedly allowed herself to be, to a ridiculous extent, *accaparée* by the pair, particularly by the husband. She let him give her fencing



lessons, she let him—at a later date—borrow £1000 of her (unknown to Mr. Siddons) for the purpose of setting him up in the part proprietorship of the new Manchester Theatre, she let him drive her about alone in Mrs. Galindo's curricie, a vehicle round which the action of this unimportant comedy seems to centre. It may be noted that in the selfsame year, 1802, when some of these indiscretions were being committed in Ireland, Mrs. Siddons had just been passing through a phase of weak philandering with Lawrence in London. She was forty-seven, and though, at that climacteric, the hey-day in the blood is tame, and waits upon the judgment, it is equally an age when, with maturity about to sink, often reluctantly enough, into elderliness, some final ebullience of feminine foolishness may, perhaps, be allowed for. No doubt, Galindo did sit adoring her,<sup>1</sup> and, no doubt, the attitude was 'rather disgusting'<sup>2</sup> to his jealous, brooding wife, but, certainly, there was egregious silliness in the following conclusion of a letter of Mrs. Siddons's to him, dated October 18th, 1803: "I have time only to add that I hope you do not swear, and that you keep your beautiful hands very clean; remember me to pretty Julio [one of the curricie horses], and now good night." Another sentence, equally unworthy, from the same letter, ran thus: "Oh! I have suffered too much from a husband's unkindness, not to detest the man who treats a creature ill that depends on her husband for all her comforts."

Long before the defamatory 'letter' appeared, Mrs. Siddons had had cause to regret her flash of superannuated vanity. When, in 1803, Kemble returned from Spain, he went to Mrs. Inchbald, 'like a madman,' saying that his sister had been 'imposed on by persons, whom it was a disgrace to her to *know*,' and begging Mrs. Inchbald 'to explain it so to her.' It is clear that even John Philip, through whom Charles Kemble used to ask trembling favours of her, dared not 'stand up to' Mrs. Siddons, when it came to a fight. In 1809, Mrs. Galindo published her imagined or pretended wrongs, and the press stated, in its garbling way, that "John and Charles Kemble have almost on their knees prayed Mrs. Siddons to prosecute

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Galindo's letter, 70.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

the parties, but she has peremptorily refused to do so, saying that it is contrary to the principles of her *religion*." A more accurate account of the family's attitude, and her own, concerning what she described to Whalley as 'this diabolical business,' is obtainable from an unpublished letter written by her to her nephew. Fortitude in difficulties was one of her strong qualities.

"MY DEAR HORACE,—Patty tells me, you have been urging the Prosecution of these people which surprisd me a good deal now in the first place, It is the opinion, I do assure you upon my honor, of *all my friends*, that it would be lowering myself, to enter the lists with persons, the indecency of whose characters is become so notorious, and in the next place, what would be the result of a Prosecution Damages or Imprisonment I suppose, and in failure of the first, what should I gain by inflicting the second? There are three children all under nine years old, too, that must be reduced in either case to a state of wretchedness, and perhaps absolute want of bread—besides all which, they have already cost me too much money, and what's more important, too much tranquility, to renew a subject so Shoking, and I thank God, that all my friends without one exception, are decidedly of opinion, that it is as *unnecessary*, as it would be HUMILIATING, HARRASSING, and EXPENSIVE.—In that my nerves have been so Shattered by former afflictions and the agitations of the last four Months, that I really believe my health would sink completely, were they to be continued; I am certain I can endure *no more*, without the most serious consequences; and I must take care of *myself* for the sake of a few to whom my health is perhaps of more importance than it is to myself.

"There is no species of suffering that I woud [not] prefer to encountering the horrible indecency of that wretched woman, whom every one supposes to be quite mad, too. . . . Show this to your father and mother and now my dear Horace Speed you well."

## XVI

### HER ART, CIRCUMSTANCES, AND CHARACTER IN MATURITY

THE idea of a double life—using the phrase with no prejudicial construction—comes uppermost in one's mind-picture of a distinguished player. To a more obvious extent than in the case of any other actress known to history, Mrs. Siddons was, on and off the stage, 'two different people.' On the stage, she was a Pythoness, nightly hypnotised into passionate emotions by the sight of the drop-curtain and the boards. In her home, she was, at all events to the casual observer, more than a thought too much a mere mother and British matron, loving to be seemly and of good report, shut in the tower of an unimaginative nature. Had she not been an actress, she would have made (such an observer might have said) an ideal Bishop's lady. Barchester would have been glad of her.

Yet signs are not lacking that the temperament and profession of a player modified Mrs. Siddons's attitude towards the concerns of actual existence. Her letters to Whalley, Mrs. Pennington, and others leave little doubt that the ingrained practice of impersonating tragic characters induced tragedy ways of looking at the more serious incidents of her own life and the lives around her, and—what was more insidious—set up a habit of confounding important issues with sentimental, exaggerated, 'pretend' issues. Especially in the relations between herself, her elder daughter, and Lawrence, after the death of Maria, there is evidence of the existence of both these relaxing effects of her vocation upon her commerce with life. Thanks to her inheritance of common sense, she suffered from neither as acutely as the generality of players: but, all the

same, it would have been impossible for her totally to escape that subtle disintegration of the sense of association which is, and must be, produced by perpetually weeping without sorrow, embracing without love, stabbing without anger, and dying without dread. Her constant simulation of emotion did not impair her faculty for genuine feeling. What it impaired—in her case, to a relatively slight extent—was the discernment of whether feeling was employed proportionately, or disproportionately, to the exciting cause.

Artists, in whatever *genre* and of whatever grade, reap from their calling one supreme benefit, *i.e.* a facility, while exercising their art, to throw off the pressure of personal evils. Even their children are secondary interests. "I love my wife," wrote Stevenson, in a letter, "I do not know how much, nor can, nor shall, unless I lost her, but though I could imagine myself without my wife, I could not imagine myself without my art." Johnson, it may be remembered, complained of Garrick that, because 'the little Dog' was an actor, out of sight was, with him, out of mind, and there was shrewd instinct in the observation.

During the years now under contemplation, *viz.* from about 1790 to 1812, Mrs. Siddons had, broadly speaking, left behind her first period of melodrama, and was fulfilling her second—by far the longer—period of Shakespearean heroic characters, demanding *largo* of execution. The towering criminality of Lady Macbeth, the primitive exultation of Volumnia, the lofty indignation of Queen Katharine were the full flowers of her art. People who saw her at forty-five, and had not seen her eighteen years earlier, might, probably, think her gifted to agitate and awe rather than to charm and win. As beautiful, in girlhood, as Leighton's captive Andromache, in maturity, as the *Sacerdotessa* Eumachia at Naples, Greece or Rome seemed her native country, and she truly, was, as the satin scroll presented to Kemble, on June 23, 1817, declared her brother, 'every where contemporary with the august edifices of the ancient world.'

And yet, so wide and certain was her sweep, she could still, when she willed, suspend the lava flow of great passions, and melt the heart with touches of the tender feminine sorrow,



conjugal or maternal, on which her fame had originally been founded. Living persons have heard it said by them of old time that no man who saw Mrs. Siddons in her meridian ever pronounced her name without a tone and manner more softened and raised than his habitual discourse, and Hazlitt thought—what, indeed, can hardly be doubted—that the enthusiasm she excited had something idolatrous about it. In Crabb Robinson's Diary, we find, under "1828, February 7th":—

"I read one of the most worthless books of biography in existence—Boaden's 'Life of Mrs. Siddons.' Yet it gave me very great pleasure. Indeed, scarcely any of the finest passages in 'Macbeth' or 'Henry VIII' or 'Hamlet,' could delight me so much as such a sentence as, 'This evening Mrs. Siddons performed Lady Macbeth, or Queen Katharine, or the Queen Mother,' for these names operated on me then as they do now, in recalling the yet unfaded image of that most marvellous woman, to think of whom is now a greater enjoyment than to see any other actress."

The premier element in Mrs. Siddons's influence—never to be overlooked, but difficult for any one of a later age to keep fixedly before the mind's eye—was her extraordinary personal loveliness.

Less justly to 'other women' *en bloc* than to the queen of the stage, Boaden remarks, "there was a male dignity in the understanding of Mrs. Siddons that raised her above the helpless timidity of other women." The self-command that enabled her to read prayers by her dying daughter's bedside, 'with the utmost clearness, accuracy, and fervor,' helped her to the intrepidity she unfailingly displayed in stage accidents. One evening, in 1809, when she was playing Lady Macbeth, at 'Brighthelmstone,' and Charles Kemble, as Macbeth, threw the cup from him, in the banquet scene, with such violence that it broke the heavy arm of a glass chandelier on the table, very near her face, which, if struck, would have been seriously injured, she sat as if made of marble. A more serious danger menaced her when, playing Hermione, in 1802, she might have been burnt, in the statue scene, but for the promptitude of a scene-shifter, who, crawling towards her, extinguished the flames curling round her muslin drapery. Him, by the way,

she not only rewarded with money, but by exerting her utmost influence to obtain remission of the sentence of flogging passed on his son, a military deserter. Peril by fire only threatened, whereas the first time she acted Desdemona in London, she actually contracted acute rheumatism from lying, in Act v., between damp sheets.

After the habit of her family, Mrs. Siddons, who, when young, showed no tendency towards 'the *embonpoint*,' grew massive with the thickening years. Every child of man is subject to ignominious accident, but it needed all Mrs. Siddons's dignity to 'ease off,' in 1808, a grievously ludicrous situation, caused by a chair, set for her Queen Katharine, not proving wide enough, so that, when she rose, it adhered closely to her. A slighter disaster was created, on another occasion, by an ignorant lad, who, being sent, on a sultry night, to fetch her a pint of ale, brought it, foaming, on the stage, and presented it to Lady Macbeth, in the sleep-walking scene. Mischances of this sort were apter to occur at a time when stage subordinates—the plebs of the theatre, as Fanny Kemble termed them—were more uncivilised than nowadays.

At a date when the Mob had not yet grown into the People, every actress had, at times, to nerve herself to face the music, not only of cat-calls, but of actual battles at the footlights. Thoughts of pugilism were never far off; Lamb has told us there could scarcely be promise of a stage fight without the pit, 'as their manner is,' seeming disposed to make a ring. If anything in the history of theatres little repays attention, except from the antiquarian specialist, it is theatrical rioting, the bursting out of bonds of the lawless, and, frequently, irrelevant feelings of the more demonstrative parts of the house. Nevertheless, a sketch of Mrs. Siddons's circumstances in her golden days would be incomplete if it included no notice of the notorious 'O.P. row' of 1809.

The first stone of Smirke's new Covent Garden was laid, by the Prince of Wales, on December 30th, 1808—an uncompromisingly wet day that soaked silk-stockinged, bare-headed Kemble to the skin, sowed seeds of lasting illness in Thomas Harris, and uncurled Mrs. Siddons's plume of black feathers.

During the ensuing spring and summer, 'like some tall

palm' the stately 'fabric sprung,' and Boaden rivals Alfred Jingle in his ecstatic mention of 'the amazing structure—the vast patronage—the private boxes—the now unquestionable increase of prices.' The last item begs the question of the O.P. disturbances.

The enormous expense of the new erection, viz. £150,000<sup>1</sup> (only in part justified by the dearness of building materials at the time), led the proprietors to increase the prices of admission—to the open boxes, from 6s. to 7s., to the pit, from 3s. 6d. to 4s. They turned the whole third tier into twenty-eight private, or 'annual' boxes, each at a rental of £300, and, to entice noble patrons from the Opera, they engaged the flute-voiced Roman, Catalani, to sing two nights weekly. The new gallery, meanwhile, had solid divisions obstructive to sight, and so steep a rake that its occupants could see only the legs of performers far back on the stage. These innovations, combined, were the grievances that brought about the O.P. (Old Prices) Riots. It is possible to peruse hundreds of pages that consecutively describe this curious strife. The fullest account is given in a pamphlet skit, entitled *The Rebellion, or All in the Wrong*; the next fullest, in an anonymous 'Life' of Kemble, 'interspersed with [scurrilous] Family and Theatrical Anecdotes,' published during the progress of the riots, with a ludicrous frontispiece by one of the Cruikshanks.

The new Covent Garden opened on Monday, September 18th, with *Macbeth* and *The Quaker*. The house was crammed, "but," says Lawrence, in a letter to Farington, "presented a formidable appearance for the Women being so thinly sprinkled."<sup>2</sup> The instant Kemble appeared, as *Macbeth*, he was greeted with hisses, hoots, and groans, and,

<sup>1</sup> "A vast expense was incurred in building and furnishing the new theatre, amounting to £300,000, and upwards, and at the time of opening, in 1809, there was a debt due from the proprietors on account of the former theatre amounting to £30,000. To meet this sum of £330,000, the joint funds in hand were £45,000 recovered for insurance, and £76,000, or thereabouts, raised by granting annuities, and free admissions into the theatre to certain persons called 'new subscribers.'"—*The Annals of Covent Garden Theatre*, by Henry Saxe Wyndham, i. 338, 1906. (Quoted by permission of Messrs. Chatto & Windus.)

<sup>2</sup> *Sir Thomas Lawrence's Letter-Bag*, 63.

thenceforward, no sentence of the play travelled across the din, except (according to Stockdale's *Covent Garden Journal*) occasional isolated syllables in Mrs. Siddons's sonorous tones.

This was the initiation of a warfare, imaginatively variegated in its methods, which lasted sixty-six nights. During its continuance, Macready's father sent his son to London, with the superfluous injunction to hear every other good actor, but not the too easily imitable Kemble. Kemble continued to act, although inaudibly, but the grand voice and presence of his sister were withdrawn, after the disastrous opening, and did not reappear till April 24th, 1810.

The O.P. fever was catching, and spread from 'a lawless, hir'd, determin'd, and persevering Minority' (the words used by Lawrence, who, in letters to Farington,<sup>1</sup> gives an interesting account of the riots) to three parts of the theatre-frequenting public. The *Times* animadverted on the extravagance of Kemble and Mrs. Siddons's *Macbeth* costumes, which, together, were stated to have cost £500,<sup>2</sup> and said, commenting on Mrs. Siddons's salary, that the Lord Chief Justice sat every day in Westminster Hall, from nine to four, for half that sum.

There was genuine fun, and no spirit of atrocity, in the riots, and, inside the theatre, the 'O.P.s,' disciplined with pains by their leaders, took every precaution to keep within law-abiding limits. The old servility of English actors, at which, in 1782, Pastor C. P. Moritz, a *naïf* outsider, marvelled, was, probably, for the most part, a conventional attitude, but whether so or not, Kemble largely helped to put an end to the cringing forbearance of manner with which even great Garrick had met unruly audiences. 'Don John' went too far the other way, and his high-handedness in asking the malcontents, after three nights' rioting, 'what they wanted,' exasperated them as much as the introduction into all parts of the house of anti-O.P. 'gemmen of the fist, with their *Belcher* neckerchiefs,' who worked out their admissions by means of sticks and fists.

<sup>1</sup> *Sir Thomas Lawrence's Letter-Bag*, 62-68.

<sup>2</sup> This must be an exaggeration. In Vol. 1793-97 of Winston's Drury Lane Memoranda, a loose sheet of D.L. accounts includes 'dress for Siddons, 12l. 12s.'

On December 2nd, 1809, Mrs. Siddons wrote to Mrs. Fitzhugh that, for weeks together, Mrs. John Kemble had lived with ladders at the windows, in order to make her escape through the garden, in case of an attack. Mrs. Kemble's nervous precaution was not altogether unjustified, for, on November 4th, the 'O.P.s,' hundreds strong, had marched, late at night, to Great Russell Street, where, on Kemble's non-appearance at their summoning war-whoop, they broke some of his windows with pence, and disfigured the front of the house with mud. *A propos*, this 'Impromptu' appeared in one of the dailies:—

"When KEMBLE'S *Acts* the public censure gains,  
They neither spare his *aisles* nor his *panes*!"

A compromise, favourable to O.P. claims, was arrived at on 14th–15th December. The O.P. final placard bore the words, "We are satisfied." Mrs. Siddons, in her letter of the 2nd inst. to Mrs. Fitzhugh, thus characteristically summed up recent events at Covent Garden:—

" . . . What a time it has been with us all, beginning with fire, and continued with fury! Yet sweet sometimes are the uses of adversity. They not only strengthen family affection, but teach us all to walk humbly with our God."

One finds it stated that Mrs. Siddons lost £50 a night during her enforced withdrawal in the O.P. season. This does not accord with the following details, given to Campbell by Henry Robertson, the Covent Garden treasurer, as to her salary:—

1804–5.	£20 per night
1805–6.	£27 per night
1806–7.	30 guineas per night
1810–11.	30 guineas per night
1811–12.	50 guineas per night.

The theatrical season covered about nine months, during which Mrs. Siddons acted, on an average, about fifty times. Boaden speaks of 1785 as a year in which she made unusual exertion—acting seventy-one times. On the average of fifty times, she was earning, from her London engagement, from 1806 to 1811, £1575 a year. In addition, she stood to gain,

each season, not less than £1200 to £1600, out of her two benefits. Nor was this all. As a rule, and when her health was normal, she utilised the months unemployed by London in 'skirring the country round,' taking the bread, it was bitterly alleged, out of poor people's mouths, *i.e.* the provincial stock actors'. "I hope to put about 1000*l.* into my pocket this summer," she writes from Liverpool, in July, 1807. Of subscriptions and 'purses,' over and above the straightforward price of tickets, we read less as her greatness and affluence become established facts. It should be borne in mind that there were, throughout her career, occasional whole seasons, and parts of seasons, when she did not appear on the London stage at all.

At the beginning of last century, the receipts of a famous actress bore a much more favourable proportion to those of a great singer than to-day. To-day, a serious actress, in the first rank, may aspire to £150 a week, a favourite singing actress (musical comedy) to £200 a week, and clothes. A great *cantatrice* safely expects £300 a night in grand opera. During Mrs. Siddons's most remunerative season, she received (assuming Robertson's statement, and Campbell's report, to be accurate) £52, 10*s.* a night, *i.e.* £3302 for her season of sixty-three nights.<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Billington, the Melba of those days, received £4000 for the season, ending, for her, on April 1st; and, for the season ravaged by the O.P. rioters, Catalani had been promised £75 a night. While, for the actress's chastening, the *prima donna* is unmistakably preferred to her, she enjoys the correspondingly solid advantage that the stage is one of the very few professions in which women and men work on an economic equality. It must also be remembered that the opera season is very much shorter than the theatre season.

Mrs. Siddons showed herself markedly 'like folks' in her ever-renewed postponement of the date at which she could 'afford' to retire. The 'castle' she built in 1783 was a country cottage and £10,000. In 1785, she wrote to the Whalleys: "I have three winters' servitude, and then, with the blessing of God, I hope to sit down tolerably easy, for you know I am not ambitious in my desires." About a year afterwards, she

<sup>1</sup> Appendix B.

wrote to Whalley: "I have at last . . . attained the *ten thousand pounds* which I set my heart upon." There is no mention of retirement, and the cottage is allowed to "melt into air," though she describes herself as "now perfectly at ease with respect to fortune." In July, 1801, out of health, and in the rush of a starring tour, she wrote, from Preston, to Mrs. Fitzhugh: "I must go on *making*, to secure the few comforts that I may have been able to attain for myself and my family." Exactly six years later, she wrote, from Liverpool "If I can but add three hundred a year to my present income, I shall be perfectly well provided for; and I am resolved when that is accomplished, to make no more positive engagements in summer." To James Ballantyne, writing from Leeds, also in July, 1807, she explained her position in greater detail:—

" . . . I am trying to secure to myself the comfort of a carriage, which is an absolute necessary to me,<sup>1</sup> and then—then will I sit down in quiet to the end of my days. You will perhaps be surpris'd to hear that I am not abundantly rich, but you know not the expences I have incurred in times past & the losses I have sustain'd; add, too, the necessity which Mr. Siddons' ill-health induces of his living at Bath for the benefit of those waters. All these causes drain one's purse beyond imagination."

For seven years longer, Mrs. Siddons went on working. When she died, she left under £50,000. Clearly, the expenses of the oft-cited five children and a husband had been heavy. In 1799, her daughter, Sally, wrote to Sally Bird: "I have always been told that I was to expect but little in the case of such an event [*i.e.* marriage], and this, I believe, was pretty well known."

The nullity of Mr. Siddons in the world's estimation was, to some extent, indemnified at home by his rôle of finance minister. Mrs. Siddons was given a quarterly allowance, she told Whalley, when he begged from her £80 to help to relieve the distresses of Mrs. Pennington, and urged, as an incentive to generosity, that to Mrs. Pennington poor Maria had owed the soothing comforts of her last days. Such a reference to

<sup>1</sup> Hitherto, we must suppose, she had 'jobbed.'

what she called 'a wound . . . of itself too apt to bleed' naturally hurt Mrs. Siddons. "Indeed, indeed, my dear sir, there was no occasion to recal those sad and tender scenes to soften my nature; but let it pass." It should be added that she cordially engaged that Mr. Siddons should at once disburse the £80.

Apparently, she suffered even more anxiety than was necessary over her husband's unsatisfactory connection with Sadler's Wells Theatre. The idea of Sadler's Wells strikes a discord with the name of Siddons. With quaint forcibleness, Princess Augusta, in 1797, expressed to Mme D'Arblay her sense of the incongruity—for she, in addition, had jumped to the conclusion that it was the great tragic mistress, not 'Sid,' who had bought into the proprietorship—"Mrs. Siddons and Sadler's Wells," said she, "seems to me as ill fitted as the dish they call a toad in a hole; which I never saw, but always think of with anger—putting a noble sirloin of beef into a poor, paltry batter-pudding!" In 1802, Siddons's quarter of Sadler's Wells Theatre was purchased for £1400 by Thomas and Charles Dibdin, conjointly.

The most domestic of public women lived her active London life of excitement and toil, for the most part, in three houses, 14 Gower Street, 49 Great Marlborough Street, and Westbourne Farm. She did not move into 27 Upper Baker Street, the house in which she died, till 1817. At that date, she began, like many another parent of a tonish miss, to find that a far-away address was disadvantageous for the daughter's social opportunities. To Mrs. Piozzi, the new house itself seemed remote. She wrote to Sir James Fellowes, soon after Mrs. Siddons moved in, ". . . Adieu! I must dress to dine what I call out of town—the top house in Baker Street."

In imagining what we may be sure was the respectable mahogany comfort—with a man-servant kept—of Mrs. Siddons's first fixed home in London, we may take into account that the Gower Street of her years, 1784–90, was a less grim-looking locality than the Gower Street of to-day. Colonel Sutherland, at No. 33, sat under his own vine; Lord Eldon, at No. 42, could pull a peach off his house wall; Mr. William Bentham, at No. 6 (Upper Gower Street), used to regale friends on Gower-Street-



grown nectarines. As late as 1812, a short lane led into an archery ground, whence a pedestrian might walk uninterruptedly through fields to Hampstead and Highgate. The coloured 'Embellishments' in Ackermann's *Repository* help us to reconstruct the relatively little London of that less Imperial age.

Mrs. Siddons dwelt at 49 Great Marlborough Street from 1790 till the fall of 1804, when, Mr. Siddons's chronic rheumatism rendering Bath his only tolerable residence, she gave up the house, and, with Patty Wilkinson, went into lodgings in Prince's Street, Hanover Square. Mr. and Mrs. Siddons had spent some weeks of summer, 1804, at Hampstead, as, during 1795 and 1796, they had, with their family, rented a 'little nutshell upon Putney Heath.'<sup>1</sup> The summer of 1790 had found the *casa* Siddons established, for about seven weeks, in 'little neat lodgings,' at Sandgate. Mrs. Siddons loved, as she said, 'fresh air and green fields,' and a proceeding that gave her long-lasting satisfaction was her removal, in April, 1805, from London proper to Westbourne Farm, or, as she, sometimes, alternatively wrote it, Westbourne House, Paddington.

Pulled down about fifty years ago, the cottage known as Westbourne Farm stood on Westbourne Green, a rural open space off the Harrow Road, close to the Lock Bridge. Allowing for the greater picturesqueness of a century ago, Paddington, 'Westbournia,' and Bayswater wore then something of the aspect places like Isleworth and Heston wear now. Nurserymen's grounds flourished—as the numerous old pear and mulberry trees still existing, in those districts, in back-garden and 'Square,' testify—so did alehouses, exact Morland pictures, screened by elms, flanked by long stone watering troughs, each with its sign creaking overhead. So, too, flourished, in its season, haymaking, as Mary Berry's 'Journal,' date June 26th, 1809, calls to mind. Not very far from Westbourne Farm stood the almost new—Henry Angelo says the cockney-looking—Church of St. Mary's, Paddington,<sup>2</sup> and the adjacent

<sup>1</sup> Boyle's Court Guide for 1796 adds to '49 Great Marlborough Street' '*Putney Heath, Surrey*' as Mrs. Siddons's country address.

<sup>2</sup> The earlier, Charles II church (in which Hogarth was married), was demolished in 1791, and the new church erected a hundred feet south of it.



MRS. SIDDONS

BY HARLOW



Green, with which, in clay and marble, Sarah Siddons was destined to become mortally associated.

Westbourne Farm was a *bijou* villa, large enough for its tenant, her one surviving daughter, Cecilia, and Patty Wilkinson, and in its progressive beautification, building a studio, and laying out a garden (with the indispensable shrubbery of 1805), Mrs. Siddons took a great deal of wholesome interest. To Ballantyne, a couple of years after her installation, she wrote, concerning 'that dear hut her home':—

"You wou'd scarcely know that sweet little spot, it is so improved since you saw it. I believe tho' I wrote you about my dining-room and the pretty bedchamber at the end of it, where you are to sleep, unannoyd by your former neighbours in their mangers—stalls, I *shou'd* say, I believe. All the laurells are green and flourishing; all the wooden garden pales hidden by sweet shrubs & flowers that form a verdant wall all round me. Oh, it is the prettiest little nook in all the world."

Mr. Siddons's turn for opuscular poetry probably never found a more felicitous vent than when he penned the following verses, which, moreover, show him in unmistakably harmonious relations with a wife whose perpetual housemate, owing to adventitious circumstances, he was no longer—

#### ON MRS. SIDDONS'S COTTAGE AT WESTBOURNE.

##### I

Would you I'd Westbourne Farm describe,  
I'll do it then, and free from gall,  
For sure it would be sin to gibe  
A thing so pretty and so small.

##### 2

The poplar walk, if you have strength,  
Will take a minute's time to step it;  
Nay, certes, 'tis of such a length,  
'Twould almost tire a frog to leap it.

##### 3

But when the pleasure-ground is seen,  
Then what a burst comes on the view;  
Its level walk, its shaven green,  
For which a razor's stroke would do.

## 4

Now, pray be cautious when you enter,  
And curb your strides from much expansion ;  
Three paces take you to the centre,  
Three more, you're close against the mansion.

## 5

The mansion, cottage, house, or hut,  
Call't what you will, has room within  
To lodge the king of Lilliput,  
But not his court, nor yet his queen.

## 6

The kitchen-garden, true to keeping,  
Has length and breadth and width so plenty,  
A snail, if fairly set a-creeping,  
Could scarce go round while you told twenty.

## 7

Perhaps you'll cry, on hearing this,  
What ! every thing so very small ?  
No, she that made it what it is,  
Has greatness that makes up for all."

With a practicable garden, Mrs. Siddons could give summer evening parties in a house so tiny that when the big and burly Prince Regent came to call, it looked [says Mrs. Mair] as if built round those two. For June 1st, 1811, Miss Berry has, in her 'Journal':—

"In the evening to Mrs. Siddons's at Westbourne Farm. Went before ten o'clock. The whole house was illuminated, on the outside with coloured lamps, and in the inside with candles, and every bush in the garden with lamps. In short, it was the prettiest little Vauxhall that could be, and a vast many people there."

In spite of Mrs. Siddons's having, for a time, the Charles Kembles for next-door neighbours, on Westbourne Green, Westbourne Farm, from its retired situation, had drawbacks, especially on winter evenings. Thus, in an unpublished letter, of December, 1814, to one of her nieces, Mrs. Siddons wrote:—

"Westbourne . . . at this time of Year and in these parlous times is rather a melancholy residence. Even dear Horace [Twiss] is afraid of coming to us, and indeed one hears of so many robberies &c. that I should have more pain and

anxiety from his visits than the great pleasure of *his* society would compensate."

From Westbourne Farm to Covent Garden was a longish drive, and, during her farewell season (1812) at all events, Mrs. Siddons took lodgings for the winter in Pall Mall, where, when Campbell called, 'the long line' of the carriages of her other visitors 'that filled the street' at first led him to conclude there must be 'a levee at St. James's.'

We have just seen that Mrs. Siddons added a studio to Westbourne Farm. Campbell relates that, one day, in 1789, when she happened to be shopping, in Birmingham, an unconscious salesman sold her a plaster bust of 'the greatest and most beautiful actress that was ever seen in the world.' The provocation of this unrecognisable travesty of herself was (according to her biographer *attire*) the germ of her favourite leisure occupation. She started modelling by trying to make a better likeness of herself than the 'image' she had bought. In later years, she must have enjoyed exchanging this story with the kindred anecdote concerning the Italian image seller which her friend, Anne Seymour Damer, had to tell of her own impulsion into statuary.

It would be absurd to expect that Mrs. Siddons's 'sculpting' should have had great merit. Excellence is not for those who take up an art as a pastime. I do not know whether anything from her hand survives,<sup>1</sup> nor even whether she attempted marble. *Public Characters* states that she "produced, among other things, a medallion of herself,<sup>2</sup> a bust of her brother, John, Kemble, in the character of Coriolanus, and a study of Brutus before the death of Cæsar." It was no disgrace to the greatest of English actresses that she did not get so far in that other harmony of sculpture as Mrs. Damer. What is psychologically interesting is her attraction towards, and capacity for, 'the round.' To judge from her and Sarah II, it would seem that the nerve centres that control the two plastic arts, acting and sculpture, must lie near together.

<sup>1</sup> A bust of herself in the Garrick Club 'is said to be' her work.

<sup>2</sup> An engraving, by Ridley, from this medallion, is in the Burney Collection (VIII. 62), British Museum.

Apart from art, our practical, rarely idle lady was handy with her hands. In the early days, she fashioned her children's clothes; in 1803, we find her making Mrs. John Kemble 'a Black Net for her Head';<sup>1</sup> in 1813, sewing a 'silken quilt,' for Campbell.<sup>2</sup>

She by no means missed life's average portion of physical evils. Mrs. Piozzi, indeed, wrote, though certainly with exaggeration, on February 15th, 1795, to the Rev. Daniel Lysons: "Poor dear Mrs. Siddons is never well long together, always some torment, body or mind, or both." Her first recorded illness was in the winter, or early spring, of 1784, her second, in 1786-87, when, for ten months, she was visited with 'a miserable nervous disorder,' the forerunner, in all probability, of her later rheumatism and the 'terrible headaches' that afflicted her in advanced years. In 1791, she again had a long spell of illness, cured by Harrogate.

One of the worst maladies of her life overtook her, when she was forty-nine, in the form of torturing sciatica (what would now be called a neuritis) 'from the hip to the toe.' 'Sid,' for his rheumatism, and she, for hers, determined—as has been seen—to try Hampstead, and Campbell records that, at their first meal there—in Capo di Monte Cottage, at the end of Upper Terrace—'the old gentleman,' looking at the fine prospect through their windows, exclaimed, 'Sally, this will cure all our ailments!' But Mrs. Siddons only grew worse, till, contrary to the opinion of all her doctors, except Sir James Earle (whose assent was negative—it would do her no harm), she decided on electric treatment. This being applied, she was 'almost instantly cured,' but her shrieks when 'the sparks touched'—which, she said, created a feeling 'as if burning lead was running through her veins,' were enough—so her husband averred—to make passers-by burst into the house to see who was being murdered.

Tuberculosis killed one of Mrs. Siddons's sons, and one of her daughters, but she herself seems to have been free from any taint of it. The first mention of the disease which, in the end, proved fatal to her, occurs in May, 1801, when she writes, from Manchester, to Mrs. Fitzhugh, "My face has been very much

<sup>1</sup> See a letter in the Forster Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum.

<sup>2</sup> Campbell, ii. 348.

enflam'd, but is getting well by the aid of a Doctor Ferrier in this place."<sup>1</sup> Considerably later in the same year, Mrs. Piozzi told Whalley, "Our poor Siddons complains sadly of her mouth—a strumous<sup>2</sup> swelling in the lip, if I understand Mrs. Pennington perfectly."

"What good does complaining do?" wrote Mrs. Siddons. She had no tendency to make the most of illness. "The natural disposition to be well will shortly restore me," she said to the Whalleys, when she was fifty-four. This wholesome conviction, triumphing even over the untimely deaths of Maria and Sally, alone shows her elasticity of nerve. On the other hand, she was feelingly able to write to Lady Harcourt, upon the death of Queen Charlotte, "I know by sad experience how wonderfully the mind sustains the body while exertions are necessary, and the sad nervous languid state in which they leave one when they cease to be so." It should be added that Mrs. Siddons was never once accused of 'artistic' irritability. Through the contrarinesses of rehearsals, she was always—no small matter—even-tempered. Charles Young looked back to the periods during which he had 'the good fortune to act with her, as the happiest of his professional recollections.'

Like the rest of her kin, Mrs. Siddons ate well. For this statement we are able to quote no less an authority than her butcher (who, also, to his loss, was Haydon's), a man named Sowerby, who descanted to Haydon with an expert's gusto on Mrs. Siddons's partiality for mutton chops—

"... *never was such a woman for chops!* . . . I have fed John Kemble, Charles Kemble, Stephen Kemble, Madame Catalani, Morland the painter, and *you*, sir. Madame Catalani was a wonderful woman for sweetbreads; but the Kemble family—the gentlemen, sir—rump-steaks and kidneys in general was their taste; but Mrs. Siddons, sir, she liked chops."

Further evidence of the solidity of Mrs. Siddons's favourite viviers is supplied by two stories Scott loved to tell. In one, he imitated the tragedy *contralto* in which she replied, to the Provost of Edinburgh, when he asked her if the beef was not

<sup>1</sup> Alfred Morrison Collection. Catalogue, vi. 130.

<sup>2</sup> This was a mistake. It was not scrofulitic.



too salt, "Beef cannot be too salt for me, my lord." Scott's other story was to mimic the blank verse line with which she pulverised a young footman at the Ashestiel dinner-table—

"You've brought me water, boy,—I asked for beer."

It was Tom Moore who said he heard her observe, 'in her most tragic tone,' at a supper-table at Lady Mount-Edgumbe's, "I do love ale dearly." With these *ana* may be placed a memory communicated to me by Miss C. Agnes Rooper, whose father, on a visit, as a boy, to his aunt, Lady Sunderlin, wife of the Attorney-General for Ireland, met Mrs. Siddons at breakfast, and remembered, for the rest of his life, her concentration of interest in a not at first get-at-able mustard-pot.

The quite credible statement made by a contemporary letter-writer that Mrs. Siddons, when a young mother, might be seen, like Mr. Hewlett's Madonna of the Peach-Tree in the tavern, feeding (*allaitant*) her infant in the greenroom, ought only to remind us that there is a date-mark in manners as surely as a geography in morals. The modern student is, perhaps, slightly surprised at finding the decorous, the correct Mrs. Siddons saying, "Good God!" and, more frequently, "Bless me!" on minor occasions. Her "I wish to God I had seen the Marquis"<sup>1</sup> would sound even worse, did we not bear in mind the prevalence, during her period, of a careless use of sacred words, in 'the best company,' when Miss Seward wrote, in letters, "Good God!" and even Miss Berry swore, while the second lady in the kingdom used to say "d——n me!" and, at almost every sentence, "I tell you God's truth." The coarse vixen, Caroline, is, it must be confessed, an extreme instance. Even between the youth and old age of Mrs. Siddons (thanks, in a measure, to the influence of the 'Blues') considerable changes came over the external refinement of conversation.

An actress's highest triumph would be, not that the audience should exclaim, "Look at Ellen Terry!" "Here comes Duse!" but "Ah! this is *Portia*!" "This is Marguerite Gauthier!" Just that triumph the great Siddons achieved. But she went beyond it, she fell on the other, for, so habituated had she become to

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Siddons to Whalley. Whalley, i. 436.

thinking with the mind she divined in Queen Katharine, Constance, and Volumnia, to such an extent had she identified her personality with sublime parts, that, in shop, and street, and evening party, still, she talked in iambics, and still, people were disposed to say, "Here comes Queen Katharine!" She could not, in manner, get clear of her characters; she preserved the style of her subjects, and her style—so much the more actress she—was herself.

Therefore it was that she reminded Washington Irving of Scott's knights, who 'carved the meat through their gloves of steel'; that she *stabbed* the potatoes, as Sydney Smith vividly put it; that she said, "Give *me* the bowl!" meaning the salad bowl, in a tone, and with an emphasis on the pronoun which made everybody laugh; that she terrified the Bath draper with "Will it wash?"—one of the best-known sayings of modern times. When Campbell chaffed her as to the clinging, unconscious tragedy habit, evinced in this last, she, giving a further proof of it, replied, "Witness truth, I did not wish to be tragical!" King Cambyzes' vein was so much her second nature that a Quarterly Reviewer, for August, 1834, commenting on "Will it wash?" says that every one who ever saw Mrs. Siddons in private could parallel it by some similar anecdote. Her own yea being yea, and her nay, nay, she was wont to take equally literally what she was told. This is evidenced in the story of her comment, on being informed Mr. Somebody was found dead in his bureau, "Poor man! How gat he there?" We may take our choice between her unblinking vision of the luckless person curled under the slope of the desk and her no less egregious aspect, in a variant on the story, presented to my attention by her great-granddaughter, Miss Mair, which affirms that to the statement, "There were pigs [Scoticè for cans for chimney-pots for increasing the draught] on the roof," Mrs. Siddons, on a visit to Edinburgh, calmly returned, "How gat they there?"

In every artist's nature there is a magnetic element. This, Mrs. Siddons left at home when she stalked into general society. She lacked, off the stage, the player's mobility, and that gift of charming universally, which, as a rule, actresses both enjoy by nature, and diligently cultivate. She possessed no semblance

of '*ce petit rys follestre*' (Englished by Locker-Lampson into 'that little, giddy laugh') which Marot assigned to Madame D'Allebret. She had nothing of Garrick's adaptability. She was marmoreal where he was supple. That she was 'difficult' with strangers there can be no question. The something rigid in her personality, what Campbell calls 'that air of uncompromising principle in her physiognomy, which struck you at first sight, and was verified by the longest acquaintance,' joining with her composed and careful utterance, the habit she learnt at her mother's knee, conspired to produce a deterrent effect on slight acquaintances. Even a cærulean like Anna Seward, all high-flown ecstasies, confessed that, in conversation with Mrs. Siddons, she 'never felt herself so much awed in her life. The most awkward embarrassment was the consequence.' Miss Berry, who had, the previous year, discovered 'how much' Mrs. Siddons gained 'by being known,' noted, in a letter written, in 1799, from North Audley Street, that Mrs. Siddons "was one of a little party we had last night. . . . She was at her very best; had put off the *Catherine*, or rather not put it on since her return from Bath, and sang to us after supper, and was agreeable." Fanny Burney's records of her chance interviews with Mrs. Siddons are well known. The diarist was not naturally *simpatica*. After their meeting, in 1782, at Miss Monckton's, she entered, "She has a steadiness in her manner and deportment by no means engaging." In 1787, when she was commanded to receive the royal Reading Preceptress at Windsor, she notes—

"I found her the heroine of a tragedy—sublime, elevated, and solemn; in voice, deep and dragging; and in conversation, formal, sententious, calm, and dry. I expected her to have been all that is interesting, the delicacy and sweetness with which she seizes every opportunity to strike and to captivate upon the stage had persuaded me [etc., etc.] . . . but I was very much mistaken."<sup>1</sup>

It was on this latter occasion that Mrs. Siddons, in the midst of being 'formal, sententious, calm, and dry,' staggered Miss Fanny by impulsively saying that her Cecilia was the one part she really longed to impersonate.

<sup>1</sup> See, also, D'Arblay, iv. 301.

Mrs. Siddons had no small talk, and, from absorption in what she rightly designated her 'own pressing avocations,' and the quiet confidence her unparalleled self-made position could not fail to give her, she never took the pains lesser speechless folk take to amend this deficiency. In all probability, she would as much have scorned to lay herself out, in private, to propitiate chance strangers as, by any cheap trick, on the stage, to catch (as Foote has it in his *Treatise on the Passions*) 'an ignorant Bene from the hard Hands of the Gallery.' When moved thereto, she would, occasionally, go out of her way to snub the 'mostly fools,' as, when, a lady, remarking in her hearing, while gazing at the mountains at Penmaenmawr, "This awful scenery makes me feel as if I were only a worm, or a grain of dust, on the face of the earth," she turned round, more awful than the prospect, and said, "I feel very differently." Mrs. Piozzi blamed her for 'never voluntarily holding converse with coarse or common people.' On her incapacity for laying aside her chopine, Campbell makes the following indulgent, probably just, remark:—

"This singularity made her manner susceptible of caricature. I know not what others felt, but I own that I loved her all the better for this unconscious solemnity of manner; for, independently of its being blended with habitual kindness to her friends, and giving, odd as it may seem, a zest to the humour of her familiar conversation, it always struck me as a token of her simplicity. In point of fact, a manner in itself artificial, sprung out of the *naïveté* of her character."

Lawrence's testimony is the same. Writing, on November 22nd, 1829, to John Julius Angerstein, as to the success of Fanny Kemble, he adds:—

"Her manner in private is characterised by ease, and that modest gravity which I believe must belong to high tragic genius, and which, in Mrs. Siddons, was strictly natural to her though, from being peculiar in the general gaiety of society, it was often thought assumed."

Stothard, who, without much intimacy, seems, instinctively, to have understood her, was even more emphatic as to her naturalness than either Campbell or Lawrence. ". . . it would have been," he said, "as out of character in her to have formed

her manners by those of the ordinary rate of persons, as it would be in a very tall woman to walk stooping."

Frosty towards outsiders, but, as we have repeatedly seen, sweet as summer to people she valued, and knew well, Mrs. Siddons showed at her best in her home, and, there, was so far from arrogance that once — the trait is communicated by Campbell—she sent for a servant she had undeservedly rebuked, and, before her family, begged his pardon.

Far enough from being a witty, or a frolicsome, lady, she, like the rest of us, appreciated what to her appeared 'comical' When, with Patty Wilkinson, she visited Shakespeare's birth-house, where a loquacious 'shew-woman' tried to 'palm upon their credulity a little monster, with a double tongue, as a descendant of Shakespeare, she remarked that nature had endowed the 'shew-woman' herself 'with a double allowance of tongue.' Another instance of Mrs. Siddons's playfulness takes the form of an unpublished letter to her nephew, which runs, in her resolute, legible handwriting:—

"MY DEAR HORACE,—Your Manuscript is *very graciously*  
Accepted.—Yours affly S. SIDDONS

"EDIN. *March 27th*"

Mrs. Siddons could afford to confess herself 'a matter-of-fact woman,' made of 'inability and simpleness'; but it was harsh of the precocious girl who, was, without doubt, retrospectively jealous of her aunt, to write that she "was what we call a great dramatic genius, and off the stage gave not the slightest indication of unusual intellectual capacity of any sort." The expressive, perspicuous letters Mrs. Siddons wrote, her amateur's practice of sculpture, and her friendships with women like Mrs. Damer and Mrs. Opie, and with such men as Scott and Windham alone go far to disprove Fanny Kemble's summary judgment. Probably, no woman ever possessed a more clear-cut, collected, and competent mind than Mrs. Siddons—in spite of a *canard* which, she told Mrs. Piozzi, in 1796, was going about that she was under confinement for insanity! Whether she possessed all the qualities her friend, Burke, styled 'the soft green of the soul' is less certain.

## XVII

### GREAT MEN AND GREAT LADIES

MRS. SIDDONS'S years, covering most of the second half of the eighteenth century, and outlasting the first quarter of the nineteenth, were practically coeval with the reign of George III and the regency and reign of George IV. Among the vagaries that preluded George III's second attack of insanity (1788) was his giving Mrs. Siddons a blank paper, with his signature at the foot. This *carte blanche* Mrs. Siddons, showing her instinctive good sense in emergencies, at once handed to Queen Charlotte. By 1788, she was habituated to the thrilling vibrations of 'Your Majesty' and 'Your Royal Highness.' Baby Princess Amelia, who, in 1783, extended her hand when the great actress ecstatically breathed a wish to kiss her, had helped to teach her Court etiquette.

Both King and Queen, we have seen, showed themselves her steady patrons. They disliked tragedy, but saw her, during January, 1783, in five rôles. The King looked through his monocular opera glass till he could not see for tears, and gracious, punctilio-exacting, little Charlotte (who, in later years, reminded Lawrence of an old grey parrot) avowed that, in order not to weep, she sometimes found it necessary to turn her back to the stage, for, 'inteed,' Mrs. Siddons's acting was 'doo desagreble.'<sup>1</sup> In 1785, Fanny Burney (before her incarceration) was staying with Mrs. Delany, and heard Royal George, when he called, talk of Mrs. Siddons, 'with the warmest praise.' "I am an enthusiast for her," he cried, "quite an enthusiast. I think there was never any player in my time so excellent—not Garrick himself; I own it!" In this same year, shortly before

<sup>1</sup> So, in the original MS. only of his biography of Mrs. Siddons, Campbell reproduced the Queen's pronunciation.

the birth of George Siddons, to whom the Heir to the Throne stood godfather, Mrs. Siddons wrote to Whalley: "... the other day her Majesty very graciously sent me a box of powders, which she thought might be of use to me, and which she said I need not be afraid of, as she always took them herself when in my situation. These very superior honours, as you may suppose, create me many enemies."

At Weymouth, where the King and Queen went 'a-wambling about like the most everyday old man and woman,' and used to walk to the theatre from Gloucester House, Mrs. Siddons acted before them. It was their holiday season, and, preferring to do herself injustice in comedy than that they should be bored by tragedies, she played Rosalind, Lady Townly, and Colman's Mrs. Oakley.

Mrs. Siddons frankly admired the 'deplorable Regent,' who, it must be said, was uniformly attentive and affable to her, and, thereby, added a fourth to his three claims upon respect in that he made much of Scott, admired Jane Austen, and naturalised French cookery. Mrs. Siddons was never at Brighton without being a guest at the Pavilion—that symbol of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century 'smartness' out of town. In 1798, writing from Brighton, she told a correspondent she did not like the prospect of meeting Lady Jersey at supper, but, realising that a refusal would displease the individual whom Lawrence's friend, Farington, seeking favours, wrote of with a capital letter—'Him' and 'His'—she swallowed her scruples, and merely said (what everybody thought) that Lady Jersey would look handsome if she would not affect at forty-eight to be eighteen. A large gold repeater, given by the Prince Regent to George Siddons, is now in the possession of Miss Harriot Siddons, to whom it was left by her cousin, Colonel W. Siddons Young.

In less than a month from the date of her uprising in 1782, Mrs. Siddons had completely secured—as Horace Walpole's discernment did not fail to note—the admiration of those Tate Wilkinson designates 'people of the great lead.' On December 4th, one of the newspapers remarked that 'on a Siddons night,' 'Drury Lane looked more like a meeting of the House of Lords than a theatre—four stars in one box, and scarcely any box

without one!' Mrs. Siddons's benefit book, 'as it lay open in the lobby,' was spoken of as 'the Court Guide.' Every attempt being fruitless to procure boxes at short notice, ladies, to behold her, were willing to struggle through what one of them termed 'the terrible, fierce, maddening crowd into the pit.' And Mrs. Siddons was the fashion, not only for a season or two, but throughout her life. Boaden, holding, in his *Life of Mrs. Jordan*, no brief for the tragic lady, rather vividly says that she

"maintained a distance in her manners that irritated the self-love of those with whom she mixed in the business of the stage; and she was supposed to shew rather strongly the consciousness of living familiarly with the higher orders. She had in fact monopolized their attention and their patronage. Her nights of performance alone were well attended, and she had two benefits each season, for which every thing fashionable reserved itself; and the benefits of others, if she did not act for them, were reduced nearly to the actor's private connexion, and many were disappointed in their little circles, by an apology that ended with 'You know we *must* go on Mrs. Siddons's night, and we then leave town directly.'"

In an age when the House of Commons, on a motion by Pitt, adjourned, and went down to the theatre, to see Betty play Hamlet, it is no wonder that Mrs. Siddons seemed an integral part of the national life. Pitt was one of her earliest admirers, and his tall, attenuated figure—he was known, among Foxites, as 'the Devil's darning-needle'—was as familiar a sight on her first nights as was the misshapen figure of Gibbon, before he left Bentinck Street to return to Lausanne. As has already been said, Fox, to whose noble zest the occasion must have been meat and drink, watched the curtain first rise on the most wonderful Shakespearean impersonation of all time, Mrs. Siddons's Lady Macbeth, and, in thinking over the personal traits of that sanguine, magnetic member of her audience, one reflects that in one characteristic, at least, he resembled her, for Rogers says that Fox, too, conversed little in London mixed society, but, at his own house, with intimate friends, would talk on for ever, with the openness and simplicity of a child.

In Mrs. Siddons's autobiographical Memoranda, we read—



"He [Reynolds] always sat in the orchestra; and in that place were to be seen, O glorious constellation! Burke, Gibbon, Sheridan, Windham, and, tho last not least, the illustrious Fox. . . . All these great men would often visit my dressing-room, after the play, to make their bows, and honour me with their applauses. I must repeat, O glorious days!"

Windham's exceeding admiration of Mrs. Siddons's acting is forcibly illustrated by a simple statement in his Diary, under date, February 15th, 1785—"Drove from the House of Commons, without dining, to Drury Lane, to Mrs. Siddons in 'Lady Macbeth.'" Personally, Windham liked her greatly. Under 'May 24th, 1787,' he wrote, "Went out, in order to learn from Miss Adair whether I was to sup with her or not—or rather to put myself in the way of being asked, having been told by Mrs. Siddons the day before that she was to sup there." What Scott said of writers, that the value of having access to persons of talent and genius was the best part of their prerogative is even truer of leading actors.

Among the higher compliments paid Mrs. Siddons was her being celebrated, by name, in his *Reflections on the French Revolution*, by Edmund Burke. If that affluent mind derived delight from her acting, he, on his side, melted her to tears, as she sat, in February 1788, beside Mrs. Sheridan, and listened to the purple superlatives of his impeachment of Warren Hastings, in Westminster Hall. "There," says Macaulay, "Siddons . . . looked with emotion on a scene surpassing all the imitations of the stage."

One of the prettiest episodes of Mrs. Siddons's life was brought about by Reynolds's apotheosis of her as the Tragic Muse, when the first P.R.A. inscribed his name on the border of her drapery (as he had done on that of Lady Cockburn) and, upon her looking into the border to examine the 'Joshua Reynolds Pinxit 1784,' which, at a distance, she took to be a golden pattern, he uttered the gracious sentence that 'he could not lose the honour this opportunity afforded him of going down to posterity on the hem of her garment.' He, likewise, she recollected—when she described, in later years, those memorable sittings—guaranteed the colours of her portrait never to fade as long as the canvas held together.

"Ascend your undisputed throne!" he said, as he led her to the platform in his painting-room, the *gusto grande* in which he drew her already seething in his brain. "The picture kept him in a fever," deposed Northcote, his whilom pupil. Her sittings took place, presumably, late in 1783,<sup>1</sup> and while she herself was, temporarily, residing in Leicester Fields.

The idea of an actress personifying the Tragic Muse had been in the air since Garrick's Jubilee, and, in that character, Romney, in 1771, painted Mrs. Yates. In various provincial Jubilee revivals, Mrs. Inchbald, in her acting days, walked, she tells us, 'in the always complimentary part of the Tragic Muse.' Mrs. Barry, at Drury Lane, and Mrs. Bellamy, simultaneously, at Covent Garden, had each supported this symbolic rôle at the first London revivals, in 1769, of the Stratford celebration. It is small wonder that, on November 18th, 1785, a year and a half after Reynolds's masterpiece was exhibited, Mrs. Siddons herself condescended to be wheeled across the stage as Melpomene, in an attitude that reminded every one of the picture. Even a Mrs. Siddons must have been elated by such a portrait—such a superb idealisation of herself and her profession. Lawrence's description of it, in his Presidential address to the Academy students, in 1824, as 'a work of the highest epic character, and indisputably the finest female portrait in the world,' elicited from Mrs. Siddons (*æt.* 69) this letter:—

"ARRAN LODGE, BOGNOR  
Decr. 23, 1824

"Situated as I am, with respect to the glorious Picture so finely eulogised, and with its illustrious Panegyrist, what can I say, where should I find words for the various and thronging ideas that fill my mind? It will be enough, however, to say (and I will not doubt it will be true to say) that could we change persons, I would not exchange the Gratification in bestowing this *sublime* tribute of praise, for all the fame it must accumulate on the memory of the Tragick Muse.—Yours most truly,  
S. SIDDONS"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Reynolds's 1783 pocket-book is missing. In the pocket-book for 1784, Mrs. Siddons's name does not appear among his sitters.

<sup>2</sup> *Sir Thomas Lawrence's Letter Bag*, 189.

Michael Angelo's Prophet Esaias<sup>1</sup> of the Sistine Chapel, with the two attendant figures behind, gave the greatest of English figure-painters an inspiration for the *mise-en-scène* of his *diva* Siddons, seated, amid lightning, in the empyrean, her footstool on rolling clouds. Reynolds's strong taste for an indefinite, goddess-like style of dress, in art, reasons for which he adduced in his fourth Discourse, here reached—for the attire of a real woman—its acme. It is some time since 'the Tragic Muse' left Grosvenor House to be shown in a public exhibition, but it only needs to be seen in a gallery lighted from above to make its superiority to the Dulwich replica more than ever apparent. Wherever the great picture hangs, it dominates the room, and bears out one of Burke's comments on Reynolds that he appeared to descend to Portraiture from a higher sphere.

The lady who was, after Mrs. Siddons, the next most famous sitter to eighteenth-century portrait-painters, Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, was Mrs. Siddons's early patroness, at Bath, and continued to be her friend. Mrs. Siddons, in 1783, recommended Holcroft to her Grace, and Holcroft gives an amusing account of the interview which, in consequence, he had with that *vraie grande dame*. 'Fair Devon,' as the poets called her, was a declared admirer of the Kembles, and when, in 1803, Covent Garden passed into Kemble hands, she became the renter of one of the private boxes, others of which were taken by the Northumberlands, the Abercorns, the Egremonts, and Lord and Lady Holland.

Like Hugh Percy, second Duke of Northumberland, John James, ninth Earl and first Marquis of Abercorn, was more the John Kembles' friend than Mrs. Siddons's. He was that eccentric *grand seigneur*, proud, almost to the point of mania, whose groom of the chambers had to fumigate the rooms he occupied after liveried servants had been in them, and forbid the chambermaids to touch their master's sacred bed, except in white kid gloves. Surviving till 1818, this magnifico lived to see strange sights. Even by 1800, the *ancien régime* was disintegrate. The 'glorious bonfire' in

<sup>1</sup> Or, almost equally, the Joel.

France had burnt up its hair-powder, and Lord Abercorn was already out of date. Alive enough, however, to be dubbed 'Bluebeard' for marrying a third wife, Lady Anne Hatton, a widowed daughter of the second Earl of Arran.

Of all the people high in place who contrived—principally, in their country houses—to see a good deal of Mrs. Siddons during the brief recesses her alternating London and provincial seasons allowed, Lady Harcourt should be first named. As early as 1786, Mrs. Siddons told Whalley, "In September, I shall be as usual at Nuneham, near Oxford, a seat of Lord Harcourt's." Lady Harcourt was born Elizabeth, daughter of Lord Vernon. She married George Simon, Viscount Nuneham, who, in 1777, became Earl Harcourt. He had large property, looked French, possessed a fine taste in the arts, and etched so as to win encomiums from Horace Walpole. Mrs. Siddons spoke of him as 'a very ODD respectable man,' but her disparaging tone may possibly be traced to the coldish estimate her noble friend had formed of her Lady Macbeth (see p. 168).

Nuneham Park was habitually ordered in such a style that when, in 1786, the King and Queen and several of their children paid a visit there, from Windsor, the Harcourts could invite them to stay on three days, entertaining them adequately *à l'improvu*. This was the identical visit to Nuneham of which Fanny Burney, who came in the Royal suite, gives a dismal obverse in the second volume (Mr. Austin Dobson's edition) of her immortal work. It was amid Nuneham's splendid hospitalities that Mrs. Siddons first encountered Gray's Mason, Divine and Poet, who had expressed himself anything but an admirer. It was a critical meeting, but how was a poet to resist the present persuasiveness of the most magnificently lovely woman of her day? He was very soon practising a piano duet with her, and giving her his arm round the gardens. Lady Harcourt was a Lady of the Bedchamber, and took part in receiving Mrs. Siddons at Windsor when she went to read there.

Mrs. Siddons nowhere expresses any consciousness of constraint or weariness on visits—nothing of what the sharper-sensed Lady Morgan meant when she said, "people are mis-

taken as to the pleasures of a large society in great houses—there is an *inevitability* about it that is a *dead bore*." Turtle and venison, and pines and grapes, and lords and ladies every day agreed passing well with the woman who had begun life as an obscure player girl. She disliked being snubbed, which, perhaps, is one reason why we do not read of her 'being frightened at H.H.,' as Sydney Smith described the process of being entertained in Lord Holland's famous mansion, where her brother was on the visitors' list.

We have already seen her in friendly intercourse with the second Earl of Hardwicke. The Yorke family touched eighteenth-century life at every point, and that rich collection of documents, the Hardwicke Papers, purchased by the Government from the late Earl of Hardwicke, contains a number of letters and short notes from Mrs. Siddons, some written by her husband's hand.

Among ladies who were friends, and not only acquaintances, of Mrs. Siddons, there was no more remarkable figure than the Hon. Mrs. Damer. At twenty-eight, the childless widow of a fool of fashion, Mrs. Damer, who, on her own side, or her husband's, was related to half the peerage, was a fervent democrat. To her, all things were dross compared with the practice of sculpture, and at that she plodded, through a long life. For the most part, her work was roughly finished—Rodinesque. The masks of Thame and Isis on Henley Bridge, and the sculptured decoration of the bridge at Banff are from her 'classic chisel,' and she made statues, or busts, of George III and George IV, Fox, Nelson, Sir Joseph Banks, Mrs. Siddons (a bust, as the Tragic Muse), Miss Berry, herself, and other well-known people. In September, 1794, her kinsman, Horace Walpole, had an early glimpse of her bust of Mrs. Siddons, and, said he, "a very mistressly performance it is indeed." It was, in all probability, a copy of this that Mrs. Siddons, in the same year, presented to Mrs. Inchbald, spoken of by the latter as by Mrs. Damer. A forgotten, but agreeable, book, *The Queens of Society*, by Grace and Philip Wharton, states that Mrs. Damer gave three busts, representing Mrs. Siddons and the two Kembles, to her friends, the Greatheeds. Three such busts, in plaster, are now in the hall at Guy's Cliffe, but one of them, at

least, that of Mrs. Siddons, proceeded from the *atelier* of Joachim Smith, F.S.A., of Bath, and is a replica of the bust, inscribed 'J. Smith fecit' 'Published 1812,' at Stratford, reproduced to face p. 282.

When, in 1797, Walpole (Lord Orford) died, he left his country house to Mrs. Damer, for life, as a residence, with £2000 a year to keep it up, and at Strawberry Hill Mrs. Siddons was frequently entertained by her, as, also, was Patty Wilkinson, who, one notes, was not only the all-weather companion, required to attend her *padrona* to the theatre, but, equally, the adopted daughter, whose name constantly appears, coupled with the senior lady's, in replies to formal invitations. No doubt, the similarity of their tastes chiefly made, and kept, Mrs. Siddons and Mrs. Damer great friends. It is 'pretty' (in Pepys's sense) to know that while at 'Strawberry,' Mrs. Siddons acted with her hostess, who was a clever amateur. In 1812, Mrs. Damer ceded the house to its real owner, Lord Waldegrave.

While there, she had been the means of Mrs. Siddons seeing something of her own attached friend and neighbour, the widow of Garrick. A few weeks before that then all but centenarian lady died, in 1822, she made a codicil to her will, to the following effect:—

"I give to Mrs. Siddons a pair of gloves which were Shakespeare's, and were presented by one of his family to my late dear husband, during the jubilee at Stratford-upon-Avon."

Miss Monckton, afterwards Countess of Cork and Orrery, was one of the lion-hunting type of great folk who, early, pounced decisively on Mrs. Siddons. According to Fanny Burney, Miss Monckton, at her assemblies, "mixed the rank and the literature, and excluded all besides." She was a born society woman, with 'an easy levity in her air, manner, voice, and discourse.' It was that easy levity, I doubt not, which bowled over Dr. Johnson, always so ductile and pleasant in the presence of high-bred grace. The old gladiator loved to take Miss Monckton up sharp, and, in after years, she used to boast that he had. She said, once, to him, "Sir, that is a very nice person." "A nice person," he replied, "what does

that mean? *Elegant* is now the fashionable word, but will go out, and I see this stupid *nice* is to succeed to it; what does nice mean? look in my dictionary, you will see it means correct, precise." Mrs. Siddons tells the oft-quoted story<sup>1</sup> of a 'blue evening' in 1782, at Miss Monckton's, prefacing it by the statement that she had been decoyed to Charles Street, on a promise of *no crowd*.

"The appointed Sunday evening came. I went to her very nearly in undress, at the early hour of eight, on account of my little boy, whom she desired me to bring with me, more for effect, I suspect, than for his *beaux yeux*. I found with her, as I had been taught to expect, three or four ladies of my acquaintance; and the time passed in agreeable conversation, till I had remained much longer than I had apprehended. I was of course preparing speedily to return home, when incessantly repeated thunderings at the door, and the sudden influx of such a throng of people as I had never before seen collected in any private house, counteracted every attempt that I could make for escape. I was therefore obliged, in a state of indescribable mortification, to sit quietly down, till I know not what hour in the morning; but for hours before my departure, the room I sat in was so painfully crowded, that the people absolutely stood on the chairs, round the walls, that they might look over their neighbours' heads to stare at me . . ."

In addition to friends named in an earlier chapter, frequent country-house hosts of Mrs. Siddons's were, says Campbell, Mr. and Mrs. Halsey, at Henley Park; the Elliots, at Hurst; the Marlows, at St. John's College, Oxford; the Freres, at Cambridge; the Blackshaws, at their seat in Berkshire; and Lady Barrington, at Bedsfield, while—of persons unmentioned already—he oftenest met, at her own house, during the last fifteen years of her life, Mr. H. Addington, Lord and Lady Scarborough, Dr. Batty, 'Conversation' Sharp, Lord Sidmouth, Countess Clare, Professor Smyth, the Rev. Mr. Milman, Mr. and Miss Rogers, and Lady Charlotte Campbell.

<sup>1</sup> Also given by Fanny Burney, and, in a somewhat fictitious, or heightened, form by Richard Cumberland, in *The Observer*, i. 224-226, 1785, 'Character of Vanessa,' etc.

In a series of eight 'Sonnets on Eminent Characters,' by young Coleridge, that appeared, late in 1794, in *The Morning Chronicle*, one—in which Coleridge had Lamb's assistance—was addressed, on December 29th, to Mrs. Siddons. It ran as follows:—

“As when a Child on some long Winter's night,  
Affrighted, clinging to its Grandam's knees,  
With eager wond'ring and perturb'd delight  
Listens dark tales of fearful strange decrees  
Mutter'd to Wretch by necromantic spell  
Of Warlock Hags, that, at the 'witching time  
Of murky Midnight, ride the air sublime,  
Or mingle foul embrace with Fiends of Hell—  
Cold Horror drinks its blood! Anon the tear  
More gentle starts, to hear the Beldam tell  
Of pretty Babes, that lov'd each other dear—  
Murder'd by cruel Uncle's mandate fell:  
E'en such the shiv'ring joys thy tones impart;—  
E'en so thou, SIDDONS! meltest my sad heart!”

With the leaders of the new poetic movement, the new romance literature, burgeoning all around during her prime, Mrs. Siddons had, except with Scott, no dealings. Probably, she met Byron (whose mother, when Miss Gordon, had shrieked and fainted, in Edinburgh Theatre, at her cry of 'Oh my Biron! my Biron!' as Southerne's Isabella) and, if she did, the occasions should have been memorable to those who never, elsewhere, could expect to see two faces so godlike together in one room. The man for whom imaginative contemporaries were uniformly enthusiastic was himself enthusiastic as to Mrs. Siddons's genius. Byron said that, of actors, Cooke was the most natural, Kemble the most supernatural, Kean the medium between the two, but that Mrs. Siddons was worth them all put together. In the day of Miss O'Neill, he consistently refused to see her, 'having made, and kept a determination to see nothing which should disturb or divide' his 'recollection of Siddons.' These were no shallow compliments for even Mrs. Siddons to elicit from the giant personality Byron remains, in spite of the flippancy, the meannesses, the lack of self-respect.

Mrs. Siddons knew Byron's loyal friend, Moore, the smallest gentleman then visible in society. Little in mind, but brilliant in imagination, and 'as good a creature' (in Miss Berry's phrase



for him) 'as ever lived,' 'Anacreon' Moore sang his own fervent songs (in the very fashionable drawing-rooms he frequented) as if every voluptuous word were applicable to the women around him. Mrs. Siddons, for one, loved to listen, whenever he sat down to the piano, playing, softly, an almost nominal accompaniment, and her quick sensibility never denied him his ardently desired tribute of tears. She was, as might be expected, responsive to all emotional music. James Beattie tells how, when he played 'She rose and let me in' to her on his 'cello, she said, "Go on, and you will soon have your revenge," meaning he would draw as many tears from her as she had drawn from him. Incledon, preposterous braggart that he was, talked—in a coach—in 1811, of her appreciation of his own singing, as follows:—

"Ah! Sally's a fine creature. She has a charming place on the Edgeware Road. I dined with her last year, and she paid me one of the finest compliments I ever received. I sang 'The Storm' after dinner. She cried and sobbed like a child. Taking both of my hands, she said, 'All that I and my brother ever did is nothing compared with the effect you produce!'"

Miss Scott-Gardner communicates to me an account of her mother, when a child of seven, in 1817, having been heard singing to her doll, in a married servant's garden, at Peckham, by a lady and gentleman, the former of whom said, over the gate, that she would give her a shilling to sing again. The child replied she would sing without the shilling, and did so. The lady and gentleman, who were Mrs. Siddons and Kemble, were so much enchanted with the sweetness and flexibility of her voice that they offered to bring her up for the stage. This was not permitted, but, instead, Mrs. Siddons taught her to sing. Hers were the only singing lessons she ever received, yet her voice became so good that, in later life, she often went from one friend's to another's, to sing a song at each house, and, in 1896, lying on her side, a fortnight before her death, she sang 'Molly Bawn,' with all its trills and turns, in perfect tune. Her family always understood that 'Mrs. Siddons was not particularly musical, but what she taught was her own perfect elocution and voice production.'

A trait, contributed by Moore, shows our lady under another aspect. On June 2nd, 1819, he writes—

"Dined at Horace Twiss's, in Chancery Lane: an odd



‘Westbourne Farm, Middlesex, the residence of Mrs. Siddons.’



dinner, in a borrowed room, with champagne, pewter spoons, and old Lady Cork. . . . Went up to coffee, and found Mrs. Siddons, who was cold and queen-like to me. From thence, about twelve, to an assembly at Mrs. Phillips's, where I saw Mrs. Siddons again. Discovered the reason of her coldness: I had not gone to a party she had invited me to; and, by a mistake, she did not hear of a visit I had paid her a day or two after. All right again!"

From this and various other records, it is agreeably observable that, at over sixty, the *doyenne* of drama was not above going later where others had dined.

Mrs. Siddons's name occurs in the bead-roll of celebrities who assisted at Rogers's breakfasts, those elect meals—delightful enough to overcome the almost universal dislike to that mode of hospitality—where all the pillars of literature were to be met, and none of the caterpillars. Mrs. Mair speaks of opening a packet of letters from Rogers to her grandmother, and being struck by the frivolity of his interests. In only one note did he hint at any higher taste, when, speaking of an evening he was to spend at her house, he added, "May we flatter ourselves that we shall have Lear?"

Scott, the English writer who, alone, shared with Byron in something like a European reputation, was, we have repeatedly seen, the friendliest friend to Mrs. Siddons, and her frequent host at Ashestiel, and, later, at Abbotsford. 'The glory of the Border' had a limitless admiration for the subject of this book, and when, in *Anne of Geierstein*, at the supreme hour of Margaret of Anjou's fate, at Aix, Scott confessed that the expression and bearing of the exiled queen could only be imagined by those 'who have had the advantage of having seen our inimitable Siddons,' he paid her as honouring a compliment as Reynolds paid when he inscribed his name on the hem of her garment.

There was much in Mrs. Siddons's personality calculated to kindle peculiar enthusiasm inside the conical head of Sir Walter. They were, in a way, kindred geniuses. The foundation of excellence in all arts, good sense, was a prime characteristic of the actress's. It was the substratum of the man who said he would "rather be a kitten, and cry, Mew!" than write the

best poetry in the world on conditions of laying aside common sense in the ordinary transactions and business of the world." Both Mrs. Siddons and Scott demonstrated by their lives that a person—whether man or woman—may carry genius to its height without attempting to be loosed from any sacred and social bond.

Whatever may be alleged as to Mrs. Siddons's withdrawnness and conversational stiffness, the fact that she was cherished, as she was, by a class of society with whom high professional capacity has rarely, if ever, been counted a justification for lack of urbanity proves that she cannot have lacked '*les manières nobles et aisées*.' She may have been, and, probably, was, ambitious of splendid acquaintance, but, if so, the inclination was mutual.

That, as a consequence of her calling and pre-eminence therein, she expected social attention, and was apt to sulk, if, by accident, it was denied her, is clear, but that she was, to any abnormal extent, greedy for admiration, cannot, reasonably, be affirmed. Though it is hard not to fancy that she took precedence somewhere between a royal and an ordinary duchess, we find it stated that, in the society of the great, she always pleased by 'knowing her place.' A story which proves that, even at fifty-nine, she must have possessed, off the stage, some palpable *quantum* of power to captivate a susceptible imagination is told by Mrs. Opie, who writes, on July 1st, 1814, from 11 Orchard Street, to her father—

"The baron, William de Humboldt, was forced to attend Lord Castleragh in a conference of nine hours yesterday; therefore he wrote me an elegant note of excuse, for not going to see Mrs. Siddons with me . . . we walked over to tell Mrs. Siddons this, and she was somewhat mortified; but recovered herself and was most delightful. We staid two hours and more, and we none of us knew how late it was. She said she had passed a most happy two hours, and had no regrets. M[argaret—a girl staying with Mrs. Opie] came home raving all the way, saying she was the most beautiful, delightful, aud, I believe, even the *youngest* woman she ever saw; and she has put up in paper, the bud of a rose she gave her, to keep for ever."

## XVIII

### MRS. SIDDONS'S RETIREMENT AND PUBLIC READINGS

**I**T is not to be supposed that Mrs. Siddons was so much more fortunate than other artists as to escape the criticism that imputes decay of power in postmeridian days. As early as 1799, when she was only forty-four, Mrs. Trench (then Mrs. St. George) thought her creativeness declining. "I think," she wrote, "Mrs. Siddons is less various than formerly, and is so perpetually in paroxysms of agony that she wears out their effect. She does not reserve her great guns . . . for critical situations, but fires them off as minute guns, without any discrimination." In the same year, we find, in a pamphlet satire, *My Own Pizarro*, the somewhat corroborative line,—

"And pond'rous Siddons dragg'd the tragic chain,"

though on such a line, as evidence of declining originality, little stress need be laid; the less, since one of Mrs. Siddons's triumphs (in *Pizarro* itself) in a new vein, occurred in this very year.

There never, perhaps, was another great woman player, who, after a long reign, contemplated, and effected, abdication on so few suggestions from press or public. A letter<sup>1</sup> from Lawrence to Farington makes it clear that Lawrence believed the season (1809–10) of the O.P. riots to have been previously decided on as her last. Six seasons earlier, when, in 1803, Kemble had moved house from Drury Lane to Covent Garden, Boaden says that Mrs. Siddons, after a 'struggle of thirty years,' might well have thought of retirement, had not devotion to her brother induced her to give him her still important support in his

<sup>1</sup> *Sir Thomas Lawrence's Letter-Bag*, 64.

venture. In proof, her first biographer quotes, as follows, from a letter, written by her, in August, 1803 :—

“ . . . Content is all I wish. But I must again enter into the bustle of the world. For though fame and fortune have given me all I wish, while my perseverance and exertions may be useful to ciners, I do not think myself at liberty to give myself up to my own selfish gratifications . . . nothing but my brother could have induced me to appear again in public [her daughter, Sally, had died in the preceding March] but his interest and honour must always be most dear to me.”

Not till 1810, when Mrs. Siddons is fifty-five, does any remark come from sworn admirers as to lessening ability for her profession. On March 18th of that year, Scott writes to Joanna Baillie, from Edinburgh, “ Siddons’ . . . mother is here just now. I was quite shocked to see her, for the two last years have made a dreadful inroad both on voice and person ; she has, however, a very bad cold.” Less than a year before, the voice, here, perhaps, only temporarily behind a cloud, had been enthusiastically described by Lamb’s friend, Robert Lloyd, in a letter, from London, to his wife, in Birmingham, as filling ‘the immense expanse’ of the Opera House,<sup>1</sup> where the burnt-out Covent Garden company was then playing. Another two years after 1810, and Crabb Robinson reported on Mrs. Siddons as Mrs. Beverley, “ Her voice appeared to have lost its brilliancy (like a beautiful face through a veil) ; in other respects, however, her acting is as good as ever.”

This last is the main point, and, here, most trustworthy observers were at one. In all that truly constitutes the great actress, Mrs. Siddons could never become antiquated. Washington Irving saw her in 1805, and said—

“ I hardly breathe while she is on the stage. She works up my feelings till I am like a mere child. And yet this woman is old, and has lost all elegance of figure. Think, then, what must be her powers, that she can delight and astonish even in the characters of Calista and Belvidera ! ”

Irving was a stranger and newcomer, but, as a matter of fact, Belvidera was one of the parts Mrs. Siddons was less capable of than formerly, on account of the physical exertion it exacted.

<sup>1</sup> *Charles Lamb and the Lloyds*, edited by E. V. Lucas, 160, 1898.

With years, her portly person had become so corpulent, and—though, in this, ahead of her years—so infirm, that, during her last season, when, as Isabella, in *Measure for Measure*, she knelt to the Duke, she could not get up without help, to mask the necessity for which, Mrs. Powell, who played Mariana, was, Genest tells us, also assisted in rising. Mrs. Siddons's increasing bodily bulk had a great deal to do with a retirement that must have surprised those, who, to be consistent, should have expected her to continue to appear for the several further seasons during which she might reasonably have hoped to make money.

On Sunday, June 14th, 1812, Miss Berry—we learn from her 'Journal'—was at an evening gathering *chez* Miss Johnstone (afterwards Duchess of Cannizzaro) at which Mrs. Siddons repeated to her, in a corner, alone, the verses she was intending to recite at her Farewell, the date of which had been announced a fortnight earlier. "They are by her nephew Twiss," added Miss Berry, "and I thought them in good taste." Many weeks before this, the verses had been written, proffered, and weighed, as is shown by the following letter from Mrs. Siddons, which their author's grandson, Mr. Horace Twiss, allows me to print:—

"WESTBOURNE FARM,  
March 31st, 1812

"MY DEAR HORACE,—In the Address you have sent me, you have entered into my feelings of fitness and propriety completely you have overcome all the difficulties which opposed you in the construction of it, with much and very graceful adroitness; in short, to *my entire* Satisfaction. Nevertheless, as this will be a composition much commented on, receive with my sincere thanks, my earnest entreaty that you will consult those who are nicer and less partial critics. *Your honour* being the only Solicitude, I feel upon the subject.—Ever, My dear Horace, Your affte. Aunt  
S. SIDDONS."

Mrs. Siddons's eleven 'last performances' (June 8th—29th) formed an epitome of her creative work. During 1811–12, she had acted in all, fifty-seven times, and in fourteen characters. Her last representations seemed to the audiences a withdrawal of the characters themselves, each by each, from personification.

Throughout the final season, there was a notice in the Covent Garden playbills, "*N.B.* No orders can be admitted



on the nights of Mrs. Siddons's performance." More flattery, more social attention, and, consequently, more worldly happiness Mrs. Siddons had never tasted than during these culminating months and weeks, and her spirits might have been kept in a simmer of delicious delirium, had it not been for the sombre thought of the meaning of retirement. To Mrs. Piozzi, with whom she always went below the surface, she confided that she felt 'as if she were mounting the first step of a ladder conducting her to the other world.' It is harder to retire from the stage than from any other profession. In the case of players, no picture, poem, statue, or symphony is to survive as demonstrably their work.

"Feeble tradition is their memory's guard."

On Mrs. Siddons's Farewell Night (which was also our own Benefit), each box ticket<sup>1</sup> bore a red seal, with the word 'Farewell.'

The great genius of Tragedy rightly crowned her life's work by selecting the tremendous wife of Macbeth as the character in which to make her ultimate impression. In Lady Macbeth, her art had reached its acme. To an almost miraculous extent, she infused into the earlier scenes an atmosphere of mystery, vastness; a sense of fate, or retribution, hanging over all, waiting its time. As for her acting in the supreme scenes, after the murder of Duncan, that was, exclaimed Hazlitt—apt, always, to be dithyrambic concerning Mrs. Siddons—"something above nature. Power was seated on her brow, passion emanated from her breast as from a shrine."

On this 29th of June, 1812, after what Leigh Hunt termed 'the bewildered melancholy' of Mrs. Siddons's sleep-walking—an overwhelming majority of the audience insisted on the curtain falling on this, as the concluding incident of the play, though a minority, Genest states, complained later, that, by such summary procedure, the play had been truncated, and they themselves docked of their money's worth. When the scene closed, Mrs. Siddons was divested of Lady Macbeth's apparel, and then, after an expectant twenty minutes' interval, the curtain went up, to discover her, in white, seated at a table.

<sup>1</sup> One of these—"Mrs. Siddons's Benefit, No. 176 Box"—is preserved in the Shakespeare Memorial Gallery, Stratford-upon-Avon.

She rose, and came forward, but, for some minutes, was prevented from utterance by the audience's acclamations. At last, she was able to speak Horace Twiss's Address. Thus runs its final verse:—

“Judges and Friends! to whom the magic strain  
Of Nature's feeling never spoke in vain,  
Perhaps your hearts, when years have glided by,  
And past emotions wake a fleeting sigh,  
May think on her whose lips have pour'd so long  
The charmed sorrows of your Shakespeare's song:—  
On her, who, parting to return no more,  
Is now the mourner she but seem'd before,  
Herself subdued, resigns the melting spell,  
And breathes, with swelling heart, her long, her last Farewell!”

As she delivered these personal lines, to her so poignant, the woman's anguish of departure overflowed the actress's. Kemble—her Macbeth in the play just over—led her, weeping, away. The *élan de cœur* lifted, in one wave, the public and its friend of thirty years, who had played with Garrick and with Macready, and detonating cheers, expressing the whole-hearted admiration of the house, from the peers to the porters, followed her off the stage. All lamented that, while still in possession of so much visible energy, she, ‘the stateliest ornament of the public mind,’ should have felt herself summoned to part from them. In their estimation, she took with her not only her superlative reputation as an artist, but the lustre of a lifetime's rectitude. “I never can help carryin ontill the stage my knowledge o' an actor's preevat character,” says the Shepherd of *Noctes Ambrosianæ*, and there can be no doubt that the cognizance of Mrs. Siddons's honest life had, throughout her career, added, for the onlooker, a deeper charm to her embodiment of such parts as Desdemona and Imogen. A thousand claims to reverence closed in her as mother, wife, and Queen of drama. *Exit Mrs. Siddons.*

There is no evidence to prove that this great player was, for an artist and an actress, to any abnormal extent avid of praise. “The applause that is the palm of Art is necessarily sweet to my sense,” she wrote, in 1793, to John Taylor, and so much was reasonable. I confess I am sufficiently in love with my subject to believe her to have been guiltless, in a high

and rare degree, of the pettier human depravities. Hazlitt spoke of an 'elevation and magnitude of thought' of which her noble form seemed the natural mould and receptacle, and one is convinced that she who knew the heart of human nature,

'Our sad moods, and the still eve's crimson glow'

was not devoured by a petrifying and murderous vanity.

Professional jealousy is an inevitable element in the player's lot, and not even a Siddons, supremely though she towered above contemporaries, was so faultless as never to feel anxiety concerning the maintenance of her pre-eminence. She had an extraordinary—and well-founded—belief in herself, and scant humour. When people impugned her, she spoke of the "malignant treachery" her "enemies could devise," and attributed their attacks to "hell-born malice." "My victorious faith," she went on, "upholds me."

Her literalness was, in all probability, the real reason why, in her own day, she was by some persons considered ultra-vain. To meet flattery, she had no disclaiming phrases. Aware of her genius, she referred to it, as a philosopher might have done, impartially—as a natural phenomenon. 'Sir [—]' told Lady Charlotte Campbell he was present when, a lady having taken her little girl to her house that, in after years, she might boast she had seen Mrs. Siddons, the latter took the child's hand, and, in a slow and solemn tone, said: "Ah, my dear, you may well look at me, for you will never see my like again."

It has been assumed, from a remark she made to Rogers, that Mrs. Siddons felt 'an envy to' her brother because his taking leave of the stage eclipsed hers. This was a momentary weakness. If she had an absurdity of disposition, it was family self-satisfaction, exaggerated pride in the Kemble *gens*. In relation to John, she spoke of herself as 'one whose affection is unlimited, and to whom he is as dear as brother can be to a sister.' After the Covent Garden fire, she thus eulogized him, to Mrs. Fitzhugh, in a letter in the Alfred Morrison Collection:—

"... you would participate the joy I feel in beholding this ador'd brother stemming the torrent of adversity with a manly fortitude, serenity, and even *hope*, that almost bursts my heart

with an admiration too big to bear, and blinds me with the most delicious tears. . . . Oh! he is a glorious creature; did not I always *tell* you so? Yes, yes; and all will go well with him again. He bears it like an angel too."

Seven months after Mrs. Siddons's official retirement, she gave a Reading, in aid of the widow and orphans of Andrew Cherry, the dramatist and actor, and this resuscitation of function preluded many further Readings of which old newspapers garner the announcements. Kemble told Boaden his sister's means were insufficient to maintain her in complete comfort without some additional money-making, but no doubt, her major inducement was the passion for interesting an audience. Acting was the love of her life.

The apparatus at the Readings was simple. Mrs. Siddons stood, and, on other occasions, sat to read, in front of a large red screen. Behind it, a light was placed, with the result that "as the head moved, a bright circular irradiation" enhaloed its outline. On a lecturn before her, was placed a copy of the play. A gentleman, frequently her nephew, Twiss, formally handed her to and from her place.

Her utterance was as much recitation as reading, if we may judge from Campbell's statement, "When her memory could not be entirely trusted she assisted her sight by spectacles, which, in the intervals, she handled and waved so gracefully, that you could not have wished her to have been without them." She was dressed, says the same reporter, in white, with her hair *à la grecque*. At a later date, Fanny Kemble speaks of her wearing 'a mob-cap.' On the platform, Boaden says she exactly recalled Lawrence's full-length of her (there, robed in velvet) reading Milton. With the shackles of sixty upon her, she yet had no wrinkles. In 1814, Crabb Robinson wrote of her still fascinating smile. I was recently shown a lock of her hair, strong and grey—presumably, the shade it was, at this period, attaining. Never would she lose that roundness and graciousness of gesture, and that ready, descriptive aid of the wonderful hand, which, in the largest gathering, distinguish a once great actress from other women.

Fanny Kemble says Mrs. Siddons's readings of *Macbeth* and *King John* were the raandest dramatic achievement

imaginable with the least possible admixture of the theatrical element. Mr. J. H. Leigh has lent me a calf-bound copy of *Othello* (bought for Mrs. Siddons, by Mrs. Fitzhugh, for 'its good large type') which Mrs. Siddons used, and, previously, 'cut' and pencilled, for her Readings. On the blank page, opposite '*Dramatis Personæ*,' in large writing, to be easily read, the following is written, in Mrs. Siddons's hand:—

"The Play which I am to have the honor of reading to you this evening Ladies and Gentlemen is the Tragedy of *Othello*. It will be considerably shortened, by the omission of several exceptionable passages, and I shall rely on your often-experienced indulgence to excuse any defects which your Taste and Judgment may discern either in the arrangement or the execution of so arduous an attempt. The Characters of this Tragedy are . . ."

Boaden states that Mrs. Siddons did not attempt mimicry of men in the men's parts. It is noticeable, in the play before me, that every emphatic word is underlined, as showing the tendency to overaccentuate which she and her brothers carried so far that, with John, valueless words were accentuated. Speaking of the too elaborate emphasis given, in modern declamation, to insignificant words, "That was brought in by them," said cute old Mrs. Abington to Crabb Robinson, respecting the Kembles.

Owing to the kindness of Mrs. Fleeming Jenkin, I am able to quote from the immediate notes made by Professor G. J. Bell on Mrs. Siddons's reading of Shakespeare. He remarked:—

"Reynolds's picture of Mrs. Siddons as the tragic muse gives a perfect conception of the general effect of her look and figure. . . . She sat on a chair raised on a small platform, and the look and posture which always presents itself to me is that with which she contemplates the figure of Hamlet's ghost. Her eye elevated, her head a little drawn back and inclined upwards, her fine countenance filled with reverential awe and horror, and the chilling whisper scarcely audible but horrific. She gave . . . more fully the idea of a ghost's presence than any spectral illusion on the stage."

Mrs. Piozzi shrewdly said that, to her, personally, Mrs.

Siddons's power of amusing five hundred persons, without help from fellow-actors, stage, or scenery, was a stronger proof than anything in her previous career of the mighty actor she was. It is interesting to find, in the Mrs. Siddons of sixty, that great sign of a first-class mind—its intellectual account is never closed. She was as able as ever to adopt a fresh or correcting suggestion. Greethead told Miss Wynn that after the publication of *Guy Mannering*, in 1815, he was struck by her new way of reading the *Macbeth* witches' scene. Meg Merrilies had explained to her Shakespeare's idea in the witches. Miss Wynn added:—

"I can hardly conceive anything finer than the expression which Mrs. Siddons gave to the simple reply, '*A deed without a name.*' It seemed full of all the guilty dread belonging to witchcraft; and it is just this idea of guilt which seems to me so difficult to convey to *our* minds, which are so engrossed with the folly of the whole thing that we do not recollect it was a sin."

From the Heads of Colleges in both Universities Mrs. Siddons received, in 1814, invitations to read to their *élite*—a compliment never paid to Garrick. She went, both to Oxford and Cambridge, to give these honorary readings, accompanied by Cecilia, who told Patty Wilkinson, in a subsequent letter, what gratifying attentions had been shown, at Cambridge, to 'our Darling,' her mother. The Trial Scene, in *The Merchant of Venice*, was a selection chosen.

Mrs. Siddons did not, in her readings, confine herself to Shakespeare and Milton. In 1813, in a letter to Mrs. Fitzhugh, she speaks of having just read, to the Royal Party, at Windsor, Gray's 'Elegy' and *Marmion*. She read in many places—in London, in Mrs. Weddell's well-frequented drawing-room; in Dublin (in 1803), at the Lying-in Hospital rooms; at Broadstairs, at Mrs. Forsyth's, for the benefit of the Margate Sea-bathing Infirmary. Half-a-guinea was well spent for the privilege of listening to her potent eloquence. In a letter to Whalley, of November 17th, 1813, Mrs. Piozzi 'half wished' that 'Louis Dixhuit,' then in Bath, 'had heard Mrs. Siddons read *Macbeth*' at Whalley's house in Queen's Square.

By her lifelong enthusiasm for Milton, Mrs. Siddons fulfilled

Wordsworth's aspiration of linking the end of existence with its commencement. Once, the moment she had finished reading the Fourth Book of *Paradise Lost*, Sir William Pepys, who was in the select audience gathered to hear her, spoke, offhand, the following impromptu—

“When Siddons reads from Milton's page,  
Then sound and sense unite;  
Her varying tones our hearts engage,  
With exquisite delight:  
So well these varying tones accord  
With his seraphic strain,  
We hear, we feel, in ev'ry word  
His Angels speak again.”

Sir George Smart, the musician, had a story of his meeting Mrs. Siddons at the Countess of Charleville's, when she told him how difficult she had found it to read *Paradise Lost* properly, though she had been trying, all her life, to do so. “Indeed,” she added, “I never go without the book in my pocket.” Sir George, taking this for ‘a bounce,’ asked: “Have you it now?” and was rebuked by her producing—*after slowly searching in her large pocket*—a small edition of the divine poem. Perhaps, she instituted her habit of carrying a pocket Milton, after the date when, reading the work at the lodgings of the Rector of Exeter College, no Milton, and, equally, no Shakespeare, was forthcoming in the whole of Dr. Thomas Stinton's library.

Her dealing with *Paradise Lost* did not only consist in reading from it. In 1822, John Murray published a ‘Selection,’ sometimes entitled *An Abridgement of Paradise Lost*, by Mrs. Siddons; and, on the title-page of other copies, *The Story of our First Parents, Selected from Milton's Paradise Lost: For the Use of Young Persons*. By Mrs. Siddons.

A committee was formed for the purpose of persuading Mrs. Siddons to return to the stage; but she had, says Genest, the good sense to refuse. He gives the list of her (nineteen) stage appearances after her retirement. She was, of course, frequently importuned to act for this person or that charity. That she appeared on the stage too late in life, when she had become unwieldy and masculine-looking, is a lamentable fact.

Macready, who saw her 1817 *Lady Macbeth*, went so far as to affirm that there was 'no flash, no sign of her pristine, all-subduing genius.' In the sleep-walking scene, Miss Wynn, even as early as 1813, missed 'the fine, fixed, glassy stare' of yore. She did not know whether 'the diminution of the natural fire of the eye' was the cause, or whether 'the muscles were grown less flexible,' but of the fact she felt certain. In an 1816 'Examiner,' Hazlitt was caustic as to Mrs. Siddons's reappearance in reponse to Princess Charlotte's wish that she and Prince Leopold could see her play. "She always spoke as slow as she ought: she now speaks slower than she did," he remarked. And, after all, her exertion can scarcely have interested Prince Leopold, for he never looked up from the book with which he followed the play, though Her Royal Highness kept jogging his elbow, and tapping him with her fan.

Mrs. Siddons's nearest friends bewailed her reappearances. Scott, in 1812, had wished a 'long twilight' might be averted. Mrs. Piozzi wrote, from Bath, on December 13th, 1815, to Whalley, in Brussels, "... are you not sorry our dear Mrs. Siddons had to act again for her son's distressed family? It is really a great pity, and when a young successor has possession of the public favour!—that fine Miss O'Neill. Oh, how the news did vex me!" Two years later, George Siddons wrote, from Sumatra, to Horace Twiss—in a letter placed at my disposal by the present Mr. Horace Twiss—"I am quite vexed to see that my Mother continues to perform occasionally, and heartily wish that those who value her health—shall I say her character—would prevail on her to give it up entirely and for ever."

Yet, still, play-goers retained a venerated enthusiasm for the dowager-queen, and when, the last time she ever acted, the moment her young Norval had pronounced the line,

'As thou excellest all of womankind,'

the house gave three rounds of applause, not to Lady Randolph, but to Mrs. Siddons *in propria persona*. Fanny Kemble describes how, early in the afternoon of this same day (June 9th, 1819), her father took her into Covent Garden to see the dense crowd waiting for the doors to open, and



how, a few hours later, inside the theatre, she heard 'the tremendous roar of public greeting that welcomed' the entrance of 'a solemn female figure in black'—her aunt.

That Mrs. Siddons, after 1812, should have painfully missed the perpetual excitement of public exhibition, who can wonder? For everything, including one's past, one pays. After her retirement—she called her *otium cum dignitate*, 'her alter'd life,'—she but rarely attended, as a visitor, the spot

'Where the spirit its highest life had led.'

The fire of temperament does not die out, even after the period of the yellow leaf has set in. When, in these flat and mediocre years, Rogers was 'sitting with her of an afternoon,' Mrs. Siddons would say to him, "Oh, dear! this is the time I used to be thinking of going to the theatre; first came the pleasure of dressing for my part, and then the pleasure of acting it; but that is all over now." She could have sympathised with Blücher, who said, to Miss Croft, in Lawrence's studio, "*C'est seulement le repos qui me fatigue.*" Under date, June 6th, 1828, Tom Moore's Diary contains the following entry:—

"Dined at Rogers's. . . . An addition to our party in the evening, among whom was Mrs. Siddons; had a good deal of conversation with her, and was, for the first time in my life, interested by her off the stage. . . . Among other reasons for her regret at leaving the stage was, that she always found in it a vent for her private sorrows, which enabled her to bear them better; and often she has got credit for the truth and feeling of her acting when she was doing nothing more than relieving her own heart of its grief. This, I have no doubt, is true, and there is something particularly touching in it."

This was, as we have seen, Mrs. Siddons's lifelong sentiment. She had always disburdened into her parts some of the heaviness of her personal cares. A sad letter, of 1815, written by her to Mrs. Fitzhugh—the letter of an artist shorn of the practice of her art—told much the same tale. She wrote—

"I don't know why, unless that I am older and feebler, or that I am now without a profession, which forced me out

of myself in my former afflictions, but the loss of my poor dear Harry seems to have laid a heavier hand upon my mind than any I have sustained. I drive out to recover my voice and my spirits, and am better while abroad; but I come home and lose them both in an hour. I cannot read or do anything else but puddle with my clay. I have begun a full-length figure of Cecilia; and this is a resource which fortunately never fails me. . . . I have little to complain of, except a low voice and lower spirits."

## XIX

### LAST YEARS AND SURROUNDINGS

MRS. SIDDONS, as has been seen, continued to reside at Westbourne Farm for five years after retirement, growing her favourite pansies in the garden borders, and taking walks with Patty Wilkinson on what Campbell denominates 'the shores' of the comparatively recently opened Paddington Canal. There, he describes how, one day, he met them, when himself dewy-faced from exercise, carrying his great-coat, and in no fettle for unexpectedly encountering 'the Queen,' though on his way, all the same, to call on her.

Although Westbourne Farm contained, said Mrs. Siddons, more accommodation than its appearance indicated, 27 Upper Baker Street, the lease of which she took, in 1817, must have been more commodious, especially after her addition to it of the indispensable studio. The drawing-room, with its tall sash windows, and railed parapet, giving on the 'small green,' or garden, was of handsome dimensions. No. 27 was the first house on the east side, and, thanks to the Prince Regent's intervention, its end windows, looking north, were permitted an unobstructed 'country view,' into the Regent's Park, to obtain which privilege for the honoured actress, Nash had to abbreviate Cornwall Terrace, then being built.

We know little of how Mrs. Siddons's successive homes were furnished. The early nineteenth century was an age of pier-glasses and '*pendules*,' of glazed lemon-coloured curtains with dark chintz borders, and of whatever else Carlton House taste judged genteel. It surprises one to read that the Baker Street house was so out-of-date, or so individual, as to be wainscoted with dark oak. In *Changing London*. *Marylebone* (1906), Mr. J. Geo. Head, F.S.I., states that the drawing-room

had a curious fireplace with imposing terra-cotta columns on each side, masking chimney flues. Writing six years earlier, Mr. George Clinch, in his *Marylebone and St. Pancras*, was able to state, from personal observation, "On the staircase is a small side window of painted glass, containing medallion portraits of Shakspeare, Milton, Spenser, Cowley, and Dryden. This is chiefly interesting from the fact that it is the work of Mrs. Siddons, who designed it and put it up."

Since Mrs. Siddons's death in 1831, 27 Upper Baker Street has been inhabited by Mr. Justice Grove, and, previously, the story goes, by a fair lady admired by one of the exiled French princes. Its final tenants were Mme. Guy d'Hardelot and her husband. In 1902, the house was pulled down by the Metropolitan Railway Co., to make room for their electric railway. The L.C.C. tablet on the front, which, since 1876, had marked it as Mrs. Siddons's, was replaced on the new building,<sup>1</sup> in 1905, accompanied by a supplementary roundel, recording its refixing and the re-erection of the premises.

The oddly variegated tradition of the house is heightened by a story, communicated to me by a great-granddaughter of Mrs. Siddons, of how one of the later tenants, who had previously been 'advised' by the estate agent that Mrs. Siddons 'walked' in it, saw "four times in broad daylight, the lower part of a woman's figure going upstairs. The first time he thought it was his wife and called out to her, but getting no answer he went to the next landing and saw no one. The black skirt was so real that he was able to count the flounces. His mother-in-law had also seen it once. The staircase was a very spiral one and it would be quite possible to see a part of a figure without seeing the whole."

Not wealthy, but possessed of 'an elegant sufficiency,' Mrs. Siddons, with a spacious drawing-room, and dining-room beneath it, was able to give large evening parties. There was no difficulty as to how to amuse people—she read Shakespearean scenes to them, and they enjoyed the unique impression of hearing each part, equally, rendered by a great actor. On one of these occasions, Maria Edgeworth was present, and so carried away by the verisimilitude of her hostess's Queen Katharine

<sup>1</sup> Offices of the Railway, partly over shops.

that, in common, apparently, with the rest of the guests, she forgot to applaud. "The illusion," she added, "was perfect till it was interrupted by a hint from her daughter or niece, I forget which, that Mrs. Siddons would be encouraged by having some demonstration given of our feelings." Haydon, in his Autobiography, describes a *soirée* at Mrs. Siddons's, in 1821, at which Sir Thomas Lawrence—too hastily haled from the refreshment table to return to the reading—was to be heard, for some length of time, guiltily endeavouring to finish eating a piece of toast without any sound of crunching. This is the sole mention I have come upon of Lawrence being in Mrs. Siddons's house after the death of Sally. Hazlitt—to illustrate the '*valet-de-chambre*' aphorism—tells that he heard a guest's footman, waiting in the hall downstairs, say to another footman, "What, I find the old lady is making as much noise as ever!"

There were other, more hilarious, festivals at No. 27, when "about thirty of her young relatives, children, grandchildren, nephews, and nieces were assembled"—the words are from a pamphlet by Mrs. Jameson. At one such family gathering, which took place only a short time before her death, old Mrs. Siddons sat in her chair, looking on, "with great and evident pleasure," while the shrill-tongued juveniles danced, in the dining-room, and made merry. Mrs. Mair, in *Recollections of the Past*, recalls some of the dancers. Fanny Kemble, then at the commencement of her stage career, was there, dancing away, "glowing with life and joyfulness." Young John and Henry (Charles's sons) were there, and the younger sister, Adelaide, and Charles himself, "and his brilliant wife, with her sparkling eyes and voice like a silver trumpet." There, also, was Horace Twiss, cutting bad jokes, and, apparently, in tearing spirits, though just dispossessed of a good appointment, owing to the unexpected downfall of the Tories. There was the well-beloved Mrs. Henry Siddons, with her four fatherless children. The rest of the party was made up of friends, old and new, "all joining in respect and admiration for her who had assembled them around her." If not on this evening, certainly on others, the assemblage would have been augmented by some of the six children of Anglo-Indian George Siddons, who, by the way, grumbles, in his letters from

Calcutta, at the infrequent news he receives from headquarters as to their welfare. In 1818, he tells Horace Twiss, ". . . My dear mother writes to me much more frequently than I could have expected, considering the pain it gives her to sit long over pen and ink; but Cecy is lazy, and even good Patty Wilkinson has not been on the alert lately." Again, in 1819, "*Many* months have elapsed since I heard either from my mother, from Cecilia, or from Patty Wilkinson. It is almost as long since we heard from Mr. or Mrs. Fombelle. We should have been in profound ignorance of all relating to our children, but for the kindness of friends not connected with us by any tie."

Home life does not consist of a perpetual 'At Home,' and it was inevitable that Mrs. Siddons should find her unemployed evenings long and empty. As she sat, chewing the cud of bitter fancy, her nature was still thirsting for the stage illusion, the dress, the scenery, the conventional surroundings, amid which, alone—thanks to her Olympian sanity—her exuberant emotionalism had been used to find vent. People report that she resented the encroachments of physical infirmity, and found old age hard to accept. Poor woman!—

*"Qui n'a pas l'esprit de son âge,  
De son âge a tout le malheur."*

Then, also, came the departure of contemporaries. Not counting that of Kemble, it is said she felt the going of Mrs. Piozzi, in 1821, and of Mrs. Damer, in 1828, the most severely. In the latter year, at Rogers's, she talked to Moore of the loss of friends, and mentioned herself as having lost twenty-six friends during the previous six years. For her, unmistakably, the current was setting towards the shore of death. Yet, the sadness of her last years, so violently emphasised in *Record of a Girlhood*, was, probably, no greater than the sadness of the old age of every one but the philanthropist. Except her modelling, Mrs. Siddons lacked interesting resources apart from theatre and family. "*I am no antiquarian,*" she announced, aridly, to Lady Harcourt, when expressing her boredom at Kirkstall Abbey. We hear little of her preferences in matters of taste.

She was not a much-travelled lady. The Oxford-bred King of Poland wanted her, in 1791, to give him some readings in Warsaw, but she remained unpersuaded. That she appreciated the advantage of speaking 'the French,' of which she herself knew next to nothing, is shown by her taking her children to Calais to school. In 1790, after dropping them there, at the end of their summer holidays, she herself, accompanied by Miss Wynne (afterwards Lady Percival, and Cecilia's godmother) and Dr. Wynne, made a tour in the Netherlands. Michael Kelly, in his 'Reminiscences,' narrating his travels in 1790, writes—

"... at St. Omer, at the hotel where we dined, the landlady told us that Madame la grande actrice Anglaise Siddons had just dined, and quitted the house not more than a quarter of an hour before our arrival. I asked the landlady what she thought of Mrs. Siddons?—She said, 'she thought her a fine woman, and thought she made it her study to appear like a Frenchwoman; but,' added the landlady, 'she has yet much to learn before she arrives at the dignity and grace of one.' After this speech I could find nothing palatable in her house."

Two summers after Mrs. Siddons retired, she relieved the *tedium vite* by a two months' visit to Paris. Cecilia went with her, and Mrs. Jameson, the John Kembles, and Mrs. Twiss were either in the party, or in Paris at the same time. It was the Elba interlude, and Paris teemed with English people. Campbell was one, and his biography of Mrs. Siddons contains few better episodes than its account of how he escorted her through the Louvre galleries. There, the grand object was Apollo Belvedere. In front of that, after standing for a time in silent admiration, Mrs. Siddons turned to the poet, and exclaimed, "What a great idea it gives us of God, to think that he has made a human being capable of fashioning so divine a form!" It is worth noting that not only Campbell, but Crabb Robinson (who, also, saw her in the Louvre) commented on her glorious looks. Even among sculptured deities, Campbell observed every one gazing at her, without knowing she was 'Mistress Siddons.' In the

evening of the same day, 'exhausted with admiring the Apollo,' and after eating a 17 fr. dinner, she went to sleep at the Opera—'splendidly dressed.'

Another day, not because she knew, one would say, but because she did not know the value of money—in the form of cab-hire—Mrs. Siddons was observed (by Kemble's unfriendly biographer, John Ambrose Williams) toiling along, on foot, in heat and dust, to see Louis XVIII hold a review. Though she does not seem to have echoed the bishop's wish, '*Paris en ce monde, Paradis en l'autre*,' she evidently did a good deal of sight-seeing.

In an unpublished letter to a niece at Bath, dated 'Bannisters Lodge Dec. 28, 1814,' Mrs. Siddons writes, concerning her recent trip:—

"With Paris and its wonders I was much delighted and much disgusted and tho glad to have been there am very happy also to be at home again, I say at home meaning England—

"It was an expensive jaunt, but I fancy we took the only opportunity which the state of that unhappy country is likely to afford we must however pay the tax of oeconomising for the gratification of our curiosity."

When the John Kembles had been a few months settled 'near the borders of the Leman Lake,' as Campbell puts it, meaning at Lausanne, Mrs. Siddons and Cecilia, in July, 1821, paid them a visit. They found them 'perfectly happy,' surrounded by what were then termed 'the horrible grandeurs of the Alps,' in their villa, Beausite; as to which contented British Cecilia, writing to Mrs. Fitzhugh, remarks that it 'has been built by a person who has been in England, and therefore has some faint notions of comfort.' Mrs. Siddons was 'dying to see Chamouny,' but, the expedition being judged too fatiguing, she saw Berne instead. She ate 'of' chamois, crossed a lake, mounted a glacier with two men cutting steps in the ice with a hatchet, and bore all these fatigues 'much more wonderfully than' the others of the party. She was occupied, and happy.

During the 'twenties, the interest felt in 'glorious old Sarah,' as Wilson, in a late number of 'Noctes,' called her,



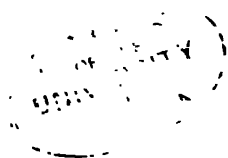
was, necessarily, in the main, retrospective. Joanna Baillie thus expressed it:—

“And now in crowded room or rich saloon,  
Thy stately presence recognised, how soon  
On thee the glance of many an eye is cast,  
In grateful memory of pleasures past.”

Washington Irving met Mrs. Siddons in some one's ‘rich saloon,’ soon after his *Sketch Book* had been published, by Murray, in 1820, and was brought up to be introduced. She, he recorded, “looked at him for a moment, and then, in her clear and deep-toned voice, she slowly enunciated, ‘You’ve made me weep.’ Nothing,” added Irving, “could have been finer than such a compliment, from such a source, but the ‘accost’ was so abrupt, and the manner so peculiar that never was modest man so put out of countenance.” Two years later, after the appearance of *Bracebridge Hall*, he again met her, and a friend suggested presenting him. He declined, on the ground that he had been, once for all, abashed and routed. “Come then with me,” said his friend, “and I will stand by you,” so Irving went forward, and, singularly enough, was met with, “You’ve made me weep again.” But he was now prepared, and replied with a complimentary allusion to the effect of her own pathos, as realised by himself.

Mrs. Siddons's serious integrity — all ‘forthrights,’ no ‘meanders’ — disconcerted strangers, and they thought her wooden, or forbidding, or priggish, on account of it. Simplicity was so essentially the atmosphere of her ideas, that it led her, equally, to place literal confidence in professions which by other people would have been received as mere politeness. “She said she would have the roof off Westbourne Farm because her landlord Mr. Cokerill [Cockerell] had said she could do anything she liked.” There was a *naïveté*, too, that, without brutality, outwitted impertinence as effectually as verbal cleverness could have done. Witness Sir George Smart's account of an episode that occurred on July 4th, 1827, when he met her at Lord Darnley's, at Cobham. During the evening, one of the other guests went up to her, and said, “Madam, I beg your pardon for asking so rude a question, but in consequence of a wager allow me to ask your age.” She replied,





"Seventy-eight years old." "Damme," said he, "I've lost!" and abruptly went away. Mrs. Siddons immediately said, "Puppy!" "Very true," observed Sir George Smart, "but why did you tell him you were so old?" She replied, "Whenever a lady of an uncertain age, as it is termed, is asked how old she is, she had better add ten or more years to her age, for then the inquirer goes away saying, 'What a fine old woman!'"

Mrs. Siddons did not love brusque and incorrect references to her earlier triumphs. In 1813, Edgeworth met her out dining, and, "Madam," said he, "I saw you act Millamant thirty-five years ago." "Pardon me, sir," she said stiffly. "Oh, then, it was forty years ago." "You mistake, sir, I never acted the character." Then, turning to Rogers, she said, "I think it is time I should change my place," and, with great solemnity, left her seat.

Like every genius whose soul is unconquered by the world, she was integrally unsophisticated, and so remained, to the last. Campbell deplored, to the Rev. Thos. Price, that, from a memoir-writer's point of view, his subject had been all 'piety and purity,' and had had, like the happy nation, no history. "Dear good Mrs. Siddons, she was a very angel, but devils make better stuff for biography." Mrs. Siddons was a prime example of 'the genius of the race for conduct,' and it was that the English Philistine venerated in her. Almost as much as Queen Victoria, she elicited the plain man's respect—bone of his bone—for a good and great woman. Not to her could be applied what Quintilian said of a work of Seneca's, *abundat dulcibus vitiis*. The faults she had were not charming. Her nature was cramped by her lack of humour. One constantly realises, moreover, that she was, to a very influential extent, burdened by the consciousness of her profession. Respectable and prudish in grain, she felt, like Garrick before her, an incessant obligation to walk circumspectly, in order to redeem her calling in the eyes of those the slang of the day denominated 'starch people'—the unco guid. Campbell speaks of the 'defensive dignity' she assumed to protect herself from the insolence and familiarity of patronage, and this may well have been the case. It was inevitable that this almost militant attitude should react disadvantageously on strangers.

Mrs. Siddons was present at the début of Fanny Kemble, as Juliet, on October 5th, 1829, and cried with joy at her niece's success. If Fanny felt any gratitude for such tears, falling from the eyes of one, who, for thirty years, had swayed the public imagination as no other actor had ever done, she dissembled it in her references to her aunt in *Record of a Girlhood*. It may be said that the painful impression those references convey of 'weariness, vacuity, and utter deadness of spirit . . . life absolutely without savour or sweetness' must reflect general family observation. On the other hand, Mrs. Mair protested against what she called her cousin's 'most exaggerated view,' and attributed it to her everywhere expressed, rather disloyal abhorrence of the stage as a profession. It is interesting to know that Charles Kemble fitted up a little recess, or box, opposite the prompter's, expressly for Mrs. Siddons, whenever she could come to see his daughter play. "She came to it several times, but the draughts in crossing the stage were bad."

In *Record of a Girlhood*, the first mention of Mrs. Siddons is the happiest. It commemorates one of Fanny's earliest interviews with her, when, being taken, as a very tiny girl, on the lap of 'Melpomene,' she looked up, and ejaculated, "What beautiful eyes you have!" Mrs. Siddons was of the children-loving race. Grown-up outsiders might find her lacking in facility, but, in the company of a child, austerity vanished, and she became gay and full of smiles. Campbell called on her, with his six-year-old son 'in his hand.' He had to leave the boy for about an hour, and, when he returned, found his 'face lighted up in earnest conversation with her.' She gave children her best, and gratified them by never talking down to them. Mrs. Kay tells me of her mother, Mrs. Drummond—when young, the ward of Richard ('Conversation') Sharp, one of Mrs. Siddons's favourite visitors and hosts—being sent for by Mrs. Siddons to hear Shakespeare. For the little girl's sole benefit, the past mistress went through the whole of her marvellous *Constance*.

*L'art d'être Grandmère* Mrs. Siddons successfully accomplished; it came to her naturally. Mrs. Mair gives an account of how she used to act cook to her little grand-

daughter, and receive her baby admonitions; and how, a little later, she would make her read to her (!) while she modelled.

When, in 1815, her son, Henry, died, Mrs. Siddons—though with her sight ‘almost washed away by tears’—kept repeating the narcotic measure of a verse, which, she said, seemed, as often as repeated, to tranquillise her. “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” Seven years later, when she lost her sister, Mrs. Twiss, Mrs. Pennington wrote to Dr. Whalley: “It must be a shock to Mrs. Siddons, as I believe she was as much attached to her as she could be to anything out of that circle, within which she has long fixed her highest enjoyments, and out of which, I am persuaded, she feels little real interest.” The comment indicates an observed development of that indrawing of interest, usually described as the petrification incident to old age, though, with equal likelihood, it might be supposed to denote (other work being done) the soul’s last task—that of fixing its affections where true joys are to be found. As early as 1816, W. W. Pepys may be found writing to Hannah More: “I was pleas’d to hear Mrs. Siddons say, upon my asking her whether she had read some modern work, that her reading now, was chiefly confined to one subject, which now seem’d to her to be the only one of real importance.”

The following lines, composed by Mrs. Siddons, may, presumably, be assigned to this period :—

“Say, what’s the brightest wreath of fame,  
But canker’d buds, that opening close;  
Ah! what the world’s most pleasing dream,  
But broken fragments of repose?

Lead me where Peace with steady hand  
The mingled cup of life shall hold,  
Where Time shall smoothly pour his sand  
And Wisdom turn that sand to gold.

Then haply at Religion’s shrine  
This weary heart its load shall lay  
Each ~~wish~~ my fatal love resign  
And passion melt in tears away.”

Every character simplifies with age, either in the direction of spirituality or grossness. Into Mrs. Siddons's there came no increasing inertia, or desire for ease. Years meant, with her, we cannot doubt, a refining process. Her tinge of Pharisaism—a general defect of her period—did not deepen upon her. She had always been a moderate in religion, a Churchwoman whom nothing short of a cold or a wet day would have kept away from Sunday morning service. In spite of her R.C. father, and the priests' education given to her brothers, she had no sympathy with ecclesiasticism and ritual, as she explained, at considerable length, in a letter to Lady Harcourt, written after she had seen something, in 1790, of foreign church ceremonials. Such opinions were skin-deep in comparison with the prose sagacity that marks her avowal to Ballantyne, in a letter of July 5th, 1807: ". . . in myself I am sure I am not mistaken. It is a vulgar error to say we are ignorant of ourselves, for I am quite sure that those who think at all seriously *must know themselves* better than any other individual *can*." Mrs. Siddons had not laid up for herself a cynical old age by expecting too much from life. Words she wrote, in 1803, "The testimony of all ages is folly if happiness be anything more than a *name*," represented her habitual conviction. She had faith in the idea of reunion with those she had loved, expressing her faith thus characteristically :—

"I am one of those, whether rationally or not, yet surely innocently, who look forward to the hope of meeting those I love in a better world as one of the rewards for having struggled with reasonable decency through this."

Though, during the final year or two, she ceased to read Shakespeare, even in her own house, Mrs. Siddons, on days she felt vigorous, used to describe herself as 'charming,' and, as late as six weeks before her death, laughingly told her doctor, Mr. Bushell, he might discontinue his visits, for she had 'health to sell.' The doctor had been called in to fight what was, at her age, a dangerous, as, with her, an ancient, enemy, erysipelas. It had, long, recurrently afflicted her with burning soreness in the mouth, and Campbell—who also suffered from erysipelas—attributes her headaches to it.

The end of a life is always tragic. Payne Collier (to whom, in 1832, Charles Kemble showed the last letter Mrs. Siddons ever wrote) describes the once royally beautiful woman as 'haggard.' A letter she wrote, in 1828, to the Rev. — Denison, speaks of 'the bitter cup' of painful illness. On May 13th, 1831, Fanny Kemble visited her, and wrote:—

"I was shocked to find her looking wretchedly ill; she has not yet got rid of the erysipelas in her legs, and complained of intense headache. . . . Every time I see that magnificent ruin some fresh decay makes itself apparent in it, and one cannot but feel it must soon totter to its fall."

A drive in cold weather at the end of May brought back erysipelas with increased intensity. Fever with rigors supervened, and Dr. Leman was sent for in consultation. For a week, the patient suffered. Cecilia and 'Mrs' (Patty) Wilkinson were her loving nurses. On June 8th, 1831, at 8 a.m., the wheels of weary life at last stood still. Mrs. Siddons expired, "peaceably, and without suffering, and in full consciousness," wrote Fanny Kemble, on the day itself.

There was some question as to public obsequies, but a section of the press, apparently, opposed the suggestion, and the Charles Kembles, not specially desiring it, refused offers from 'many of the Nobility and Gentry' to follow in the funeral train. To the public, Mrs. Siddons's death had taken place on June 29th, 1812.

Her interment was conducted, on June 15th, by an undertaker named Nixon. An upholsterer also, he had been her landlord in Prince's Street, where, finding from his card his secondary occupation, she had said, in 1804, "Well then, Mr. Nixon, I bespeak you to bury me." Fully five thousand persons are said to have witnessed her funeral. In the *Morning Post*, June 16th, 1831, may be read as follows:—

#### "FUNERAL OF MRS. SIDDONS

"The mortal remains of this great actress, whose name and fame must be immortal, were yesterday consigned to the grave.

"At nine o'clock there was a large assemblage of persons in Upper Baker-street, to witness the funeral. At half-past ten o'clock the signal was given for the mournful procession to



move. The covering of the coffin containing the body was of a rich purple velvet, and was placed in a hearse, drawn by four horses, followed by two mourning coaches and four, containing the relatives of the deceased. Afterwards fourteen mourning coaches, drawn by two horses, each containing four gentlemen mourners belonging to the Theatres; two gentlemen's carriages brought up the procession. The cavalcade proceeded along the Park-road, Regent's Park, up the Alpha-road, through Princes-street to Paddington Church, where the body was deposited in a vault at a quarter past twelve o'clock."

In the vault of the church adjoining, Lady Hamilton, in 1810, laid her devoted mother, Mrs. 'Cadogan.' Thomas Banks, R.A., the sculptor; the two Nollekens, father and son; Whitefoord, 'wit and diplomatist'<sup>1</sup>; Sir William Beechey; and, as we have seen, Haydon, were all buried in Paddington Churchyard. Inside the church is a mural tablet to Richard Twiss; and in the chancel, on the north of the altar, one, in black and white marble, to Mrs. Siddons, bearing the inscription—

Sacred to the Memory of  
SARAH SIDDONS  
Who departed this life June 8 1831,  
In her 76th Year

—  
'I know that my REDEEMER liveth.'

The stone over the vault in the burial-ground bore similar words, and—selected by Mrs. Siddons herself—the text, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord." George Siddons, who, on his retirement from the Bengal Civil Service, lived, till his death, in Harewood Square, was buried by the side of his mother. His wife, who survived him for many years, lies there too. In 1890, Mr. Clinch wrote of Mrs. Siddons's grave as 'marked only by a slab of cement, bearing no legible inscription on its face, and distinguished only by a half obliterated legend cut in its upper edge.' In 1907, the tomb was substantially restored by Mr. Henry G. I. Siddons, and, in 1908, roofed with glass.

<sup>1</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography.*

Out of the life-story of the foremost woman England has produced in the region of the arts one main impression emerges. It is that, with her, the Muse was, indeed, a 'heavenly goddess,' and not a lawless runaway. Mrs. Siddons possessed firmer moral equipoise, less of the seamy side of the artistic temperament, than any other player of whose actions and habits we have any record. It were well with all actresses, with all artists, with all who belong to neither category, if their worst defects proved, at the last, a paucity of humour and a prudence somewhat over-marked.

Mrs. Siddons stands, again, for the mother-woman in combination with the supreme and instinctive actress, and such women (if one can speak in the plural at all) are exceedingly rare. At the same time that she was a constructive artist, ardent and tenacious in her calling, she was, to the finest fibre of her nature, the simple being Campbell called her. An affirmative, productive creature, 'a flash of the will that can,' she possessed—for a player, in a unique degree—the sincerity of greatness.

Her most distinctive characteristic of mind—a characteristic that reappeared in several other members of her race, notably, in her nieces, Fanny and Adelaide Kemble—was an extraordinary sense of, and passion for, the ideal, joined with an extraordinary personal power of impressing the sense of it on others. As Stothard said, "Her own mind was noble, and that made her acting so." Nothing about her was feline, nothing serpentine. In virtue of her complete sanity, she may, possibly, be termed, in minor matters, a Philistine, but, whether so or not, she was, most certainly, an Olympian.

## APPENDIX A (p. 188)

### ELIZA?

MRS. SIDDONS had three daughters known to history, Sally, Maria, and Cecilia, and two sons, Henry (Harry) and George John.

In Mrs. Siddons's letters to the Whalleys there occur four passages that baffle the present biographer. They run:—

(March 13th, 1785) "Next week I shall see your daughter and the rest. Sarah is an elegant creature, and Maria is as beautiful as a seraphim."

(Sept. 28th, 1785) "Your little Eliza is as fair as wax, with very blue eyes, and the sweetest tuneful little voice you ever heard."

(Aug. 11th, 1786) "My children are all well, clever, and lovely. . . . I want sadly to find a genteel, accomplished woman to superintend my three girls under my own roof." [*N.B.* Mrs. Siddons's third known daughter, Cecilia, Dr. Whalley's godchild, was not born till 1794.]

(Oct. 1st, 1786) "My family is well, God be praised! . . . At Christmas I bring my dear girls from Miss Eames, or rather, she brings them to me. Eliza is the most entertaining creature in the world; Sally is vastly clever; Maria and George are beautiful; and Harry a boy with very good parts, but not disposed to learning. My husband is well. . . ."

The tenor of the above extracts would lead a casual reader to think of Mrs. Siddons as the mother of a schoolgirl, named Eliza, the eldest of three daughters, though in no other letter I can come across, from or to Mrs. Siddons, and in no published memoir of her, or of any member of her circle, is any trace of such an Eliza to be found. It is unthinkable that the death of so old a child, occurring later than October 1st, 1786, should never have been referred to, in the intimate Pennington and Bird correspondences that record the illnesses and deaths of Maria and Sally. Equally impossible is it to imagine 'Eliza' the daughter stated to have been born to Mrs. Siddons in 1781, and to have died in infancy, the child whose name is given, in

the Bath Abbey Register, under Deaths, as Frances Emilia, A reference made by Anna Seward to an approaching confinement of Mrs. Siddons's, in 1783, can scarcely be linked with the birth of a daughter, who, in 1786, was, apparently, a schoolgirl, first named of three. Pending the possible unearthing of letters explaining Eliza, we must stay ourselves on the surmise that she may have been a niece, or *protégée*, of Mrs. Whalley, or of Dr. Whalley—he had no child by any of his wives—who was being brought up with Sally and Maria. Dorothy Place, it may be remembered, and, also, Patty Wilkinson, were inmates of the Siddons household. This surmise is, to some slight extent, strengthened by the fact that Whalley used to call his first wife (Elizabeth Sherwood) 'Eliza.' She lived till 1801. The identity of Eliza is, up to now, as impossible to elucidate as is that of the 'young woman,' mentioned by Campbell, 'who,' at Mrs. Siddons's funeral, 'came veiled,' and 'knelt beside the coffin, with demonstrations of the strongest grief.'

## APPENDIX B (p. 235)

THE appended list of Mrs. Siddons's nights, during her last three seasons, has been kindly made for me by Mrs. Charles Enthoven, from consecutive Covent Garden bills, for these years, in her possession :—

1809-1810.						1810-1811.						1811-1812.					
September.	(O.P. Riots.)	April.	May.	June.	July.	October.	November.	December.	April.	May.	June.	September.	October.	November.	December.	April.	May.
18		24 26 28 30	2 3 5 8 10 12 14 17 19 24 26 28 31	1 4 11 16 18 21 25	2 4	17 20 23 27 30	15 17 20 24 27	1 4 8 11 13 15 18 20 22	22 27	1 4 15 18 21 25 28	6 8 10 17 24	18 21 25 28	2 5 9 12 15 19 23 26 30	2 5 8 10 12 14 17 20 23 26 28 30	3 5 7 10 12 14 17 20 23	9 11 14 18 21 25 28 30	2 5 9 12 15 19 23 26 27 29
1		4	13	7	2	5	5	9	2	7	5	4	9	11	11	7	9
1809-1810— Total, 27 nights.						1810-1811— Total, 33 nights.						1811-1812— Total, 63 nights.					

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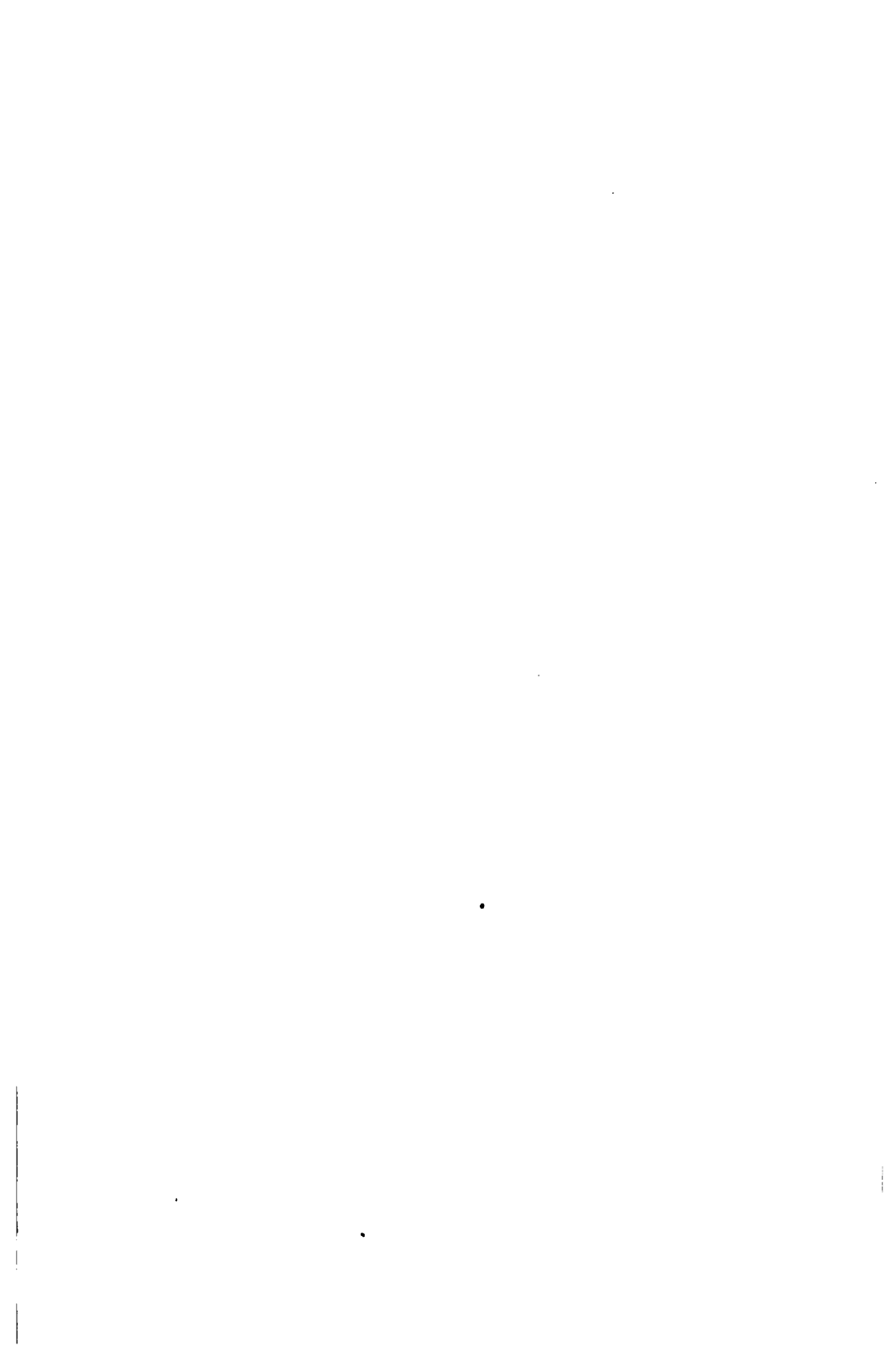
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